# HER MOTHER'S SECRET

BY MRS. SOUTHWORTH

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# *Her Mother's Secret*

## *A Novel*

*By*

MRS. E. D. E. N. SOUTHWORTH

AUTHOR OF

"A Leap in the Dark," "A Beautiful Fiend," "Fair Play,"
"Em," "Em's Husband," "David Lindsay," Etc.

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HER MOTHER'S SECRET


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# HER MOTHER'S SECRET

## CHAPTER I

### THE MISTRESS OF MONDREER

"Mother! Oh, mother! it will break my heart!" wailed Odalite, sinking at the lady's feet, and dropping her head into her hands, face downward to the carpet.

The lady gently raised her child, took her in her arms and tenderly caressed her, murmuring, softly:

"No, my own! hearts never break, or one heart, I know, must have broken long ago. Besides," she added, in a firmer tone, "honor must be saved, though hearts be sacrificed."

" 'Honor,' mother dear? I do not understand. I do not see what honor has to do with it. Or if it has, I should think that honor would be better saved by my keeping faith with Le than by breaking with him! Oh, mother! mother! it will kill me!" moaned Odalite.

"My child, my dear girl, hear me! Listen to reason! Leonidas Force has no claim to be remembered by you. You have never been engaged to him. You were but a little girl of thirteen when he went to sea on his first voyage, three years ago, and you have not seen him since. What possible claim can he have upon you, since no betrothal exists between you?" gently questioned the lady, tenderly running her fair fingers through the dark tresses of the young head that leaned upon her bosom.

"Oh, mother," replied the girl, with a heavy sigh, "I know that there was no formal betrothal between Le and myself—but—but—we all knew, you and father and Le and I—all knew—and always knew that we two belonged to each other and would always belong to each other all our lives. Le and I never thought of any other fate."

"Idle, childish fancies, my poor little girl! too trivial to cause you these tears. Wipe them away, and look clearly at the higher destiny, more worthy of your birth and beauty," murmured the lady, pressing her ripe, red lips upon the pale brow of her darling.

"Oh, mother, I do not *want* a higher destiny! I do not want *any* destiny apart from Le. And these are *not* childish fancies, and *not* trivial to me! Oh, think, mother, Le and I were playmates as far back in my life as I can remember. We loved each other better than we loved any one else in the whole world. You and father used to laugh at us and pretend to be jealous; but we saw that you were pleased all the time; for you both intended us for each other, and we knew it, too, for father used to say when he saw how inseparable we two were: 'So much the better; I hope their hearts will not be estranged when they grow up!' And our hearts have never become estranged from each other!"

"Oh, yes, dearest, I know that there was some speculative talk when you were children of uniting you and Leonidas, so that the name of Force might not die out from Mondreer. But I never really approved of marrying cousins, Odalite, merely to keep the family name on the family estate."

"But, mother, darling, Le and I never thought of the family name and estate; we only thought of one another. And, besides, we are such very, very distant cousins—only fourth or fifth, I think—that that objection could never be raised. Oh, mother! dear mother! do not compel me to break with Le! I cannot! I cannot! Oh,

indeed, I cannot!" she cried, burying her face in the lady's bosom.

Elfrida Force caressed her daughter in silence.

Presently Odalite lifted her head and pleaded:

"He is coming home so soon now, and so full of hope! He expects to be here by Christmas; and he expects—oh, yes, I know by his last letter that he expects to—to—to——" The girl's eyes fell under the compassionate yet scrutinizing gaze of her mother, and her voice faltered into silence.

"To marry you early in the new year, I suppose you mean, dear."

"Yes, mother."

"He did not say so."

"No, mother, dear, he did not say so, in so many words, but from the whole tone of his letter he evidently meant so. Father thought he did, and even tried to tease me about the New Year's wedding—asking me how many hundreds I should need to buy my wedding clothes."

"What was it he said in his letter that leads you to suppose he has any such expectations? I confess that I saw nothing of such an intention when I read the letter."

"Only this, mother, but it was very significant. He wrote that now he had inherited Greenbushes and all his Aunt Laura's money, he was rich enough to resign from the navy, and he need not go to sea any more, nor ever part with me again; but that he could stay home, repair and refurnish the house, improve the land, and farm it on all the new principles, and make the place a paradise for us to live in. He wrote, mother, dear, as of certain fixed facts."

"He was very presumptuous, my dear little girl, for there is nothing certain in this world of changes," gravely commented the lady.

"But Le's heart has not changed, nor has mine."

"My poor darling," said Elfrida Force, smoothing her daughter's dark hair with a gentle hand, "my precious child! It grieves me to do so, but I must prepare you for what seems inevitable. You must forget all this youthful folly, and think of Leonidas Force only as a cousin. You do not really love him as a betrothed maiden should love her affianced husband. You only fancy that you do. In reality you know nothing of such a love as that. Le was brought up in the house with you. You have no brother. Le has no sister. You therefore love each other as brother and sister. By and by you both may discover—but not for each other—the higher, deeper, stronger love which unites the husband and the wife in a true marriage—such a love as I could wish might crown my darling's life with lasting joy—such a love as you might find in a union with Angus Anglesea, if you would but give him the opportunity of winning your heart."

"Madam!" exclaimed the girl, starting to her feet, and gathering her black brows over black eyes that blazed with indignation, "I hate Col. Anglesea! I hate him and I fear him! And I would rather die this day and never behold the face of Le again, than listen to Col. Anglesea!"

"Odalite! Odalite, my child! You are talking to your mother. Come to my heart again, and calm your excitement," said the lady, holding out her arms.

And the young girl fell weeping upon the bosom of her mother.

The lady allowed some time to pass in which the girl's paroxysm of tears exhausted itself, and then caressing her gently, she began, in a soothing tone:

"My precious child, do you doubt your mother's love or truth?"

"Oh, no, no, no! How could you ask such a question of your own child, mother?" earnestly protested Odalite.

"Do you doubt that duty is to be held above all other considerations?"

"No! Oh, no!"

"Well, then, I have something to tell you, my darling, which will make you forget all selfish aims, and even also the wishes of your old playmate. Come with me to your own bedchamber, where we shall be most secure from interruption. I will tell you of a fatal episode in my own youth, when I was younger even than you are now. Oh, that I should have to tell such a tale to my daughter! But, Odalite, when you have heard it you will learn just what you have to do in order to save us all, and especially to save your noble, generous, honorable father from ruin and disgrace. And then, Odalite, when you have learned all, you shall do exactly as you please. Not one word of coercion, not another word of persuasion, will I utter. I will leave our fate in your hands, and you shall be absolutely free to act. Come with me now."

She took her daughter's arm, and they arose from the sofa.

For a moment they stood, quite accidentally, facing a tall mirror, between two windows on the opposite side of the room, and that mirror for the moment reflected two beautiful forms, of which it would be difficult to decide the one to bear off the palm for beauty.

The elder lady, Elfrida Force, was a tall, stately blonde, with a superbly rounded form, a rich complexion, and an affluence of golden brown hair, rippling all over her fine head, and gathered into a mass at the nape of her graceful neck. She wore an inexpensive, closely fitting dress of dark blue serge, whose very plainness set off the perfection of her figure and enhanced the brilliancy of her complexion, showing to the best advantage that splendid beauty, which at the age of thirty-five had reached its zenith. Just now, however, the vivid

brightness of her bloom had faded to a pale rose tint, and her lovely blue eyes seemed heavy with unshed tears.

Her young daughter, Odalite, equally beautiful in her way, was yet of an entirely opposite type. She was of medium height, and her form, though well rounded, was slender almost to fragility. Her head was small, and covered with rippling, jet black hair. Her eyes and eyebrows were black as jet; her features were delicate and regular; and her complexion was of a clear, ivory-white. She wore a crimson, merino dress, plainly made, closely fitting, and relieved only by narrow, white ruffles at throat and wrists.

Only for a moment they paused, and then they walked out of the room, and the pretty picture disappeared.

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## CHAPTER II

### FAMILY MYSTERIES

Mondreer was one of the finest old places on the western shore of Maryland. The estate covered fifteen hundred acres of richly cultivated, heavily wooded and well-watered land, running back from the Chesapeake.

The manor house stood upon rising ground, facing the east, and commanding a fine sea view in front, while it was sheltered on the north and west by a heavy growth of trees.

Mondreer had been in the possession of the Forces from the year 1634, when Aaron Force came over with the flower of the British Catholic gentry who, with Leonard Calvert, founded the province of Maryland.

They had prospered in every generation, and now owned more land and money than they had possessed when they first settled on the soil.

Although there was no entail of the manor, yet the

estate had, as a matter of custom, always come down through the eldest son of the family, though all the younger sons and daughters were almost equally well provided for.

Usually the Forces had married among their own people, according to the time-honored custom of the country. Indeed, they had invariably done so up to the present generation, when young Abel Force was master of Mondreer.

Great, therefore, was the consternation of the whole community when the heir of Mondreer, the handsomest, the wealthiest and the most accomplished among the young men of the county, if not of the whole State, instead of marrying some cousin or companion whom everybody knew all about, had, while on his travels abroad, forgotten all the venerable traditions of his native place, and "gone and wedded a stranger and foreigner" whom no one knew, or could find out anything about, except that she was as handsome as Juno, as haughty as Lucifer, and as poor as Lazarus.

However, as soon as it was ascertained that the newly married couple were quite established at Mondreer, the county people began to call on them—some from curiosity, some from etiquette, some from neighborly kindness, others because Mondreer was one of the pleasantest houses in the world to visit, and many from a mixture of several or of all these motives.

And every one who went to see the bride came back with such accounts of her grace, her beauty and her elegance that she became the standing theme of conversation at all the tea tables and bar rooms of the county.

They were certainly a very handsome couple. He was a tall, finely formed, stately man, with a Roman profile, brown complexion, dark eyes and jet-black hair and beard. She was a tall, elegant and graceful blonde, with Grecian features, a blooming complexion, dark blue eyes, and rich, sunny, golden-brown hair.

Theirs had evidently been a love match—a real, poetic, romantic, sentimental love match of the oldest-fashioned pattern.

He thought that he had found in her the very pearl, or rose, or star of womanhood—and so even thought many other men, when basking in her smiles, to be sure.

She thought that she had discovered in him the man of men.

In a word, they really adored one another. Each lived only for the other. Each would have suffered or died to save the other a single pang.

Even when, in time, children came to them, though they loved the little ones with more than usual parental affection, yet they loved them less than they loved each other.

Yet, with everything to make them blessed, it was cautiously whispered in the neighborhood that the household of Mondreer was not a happy one; that the beautiful mistress was subject to occasional periods of such profound depression—such intense gloom—as filled her husband's heart with alarm, and shadowed even her physician's mind with forebodings that these symptoms indicated the approach of that worst and most hopeless form of mental disease, melancholia.

Her devoted husband often proposed to take her, during the summer, to Saratoga or Newport; or, during the winter, to Washington or to Baltimore; he even urged her at all times to let him take her to Europe. But she firmly objected to leaving Mondreer, insisting that she was happier there than she could be anywhere else.

And, in truth, as years passed on, and children came, her melancholy seemed gradually to wear off, until in time it wholly disappeared.

Three children were born to them—all girls.

Odalite, the eldest, was thought to resemble both parents, having the Grecian profile and the fair complexion

of her mother, and the black eyes and black hair of her father.

Wynnette, the second girl, was a perfect brunette, with a saucy snub nose, brown complexion, and black eyes and black hair.

Elfrida, or Elva, was all her mother—a faultless blonde—with fair complexion, blue eyes, and golden-brown hair.

Failing male heirs, Odalite, the eldest daughter of the house, would, not from any law of primogeniture, but merely by the custom of the country, be the heiress of the manor, though Wynnette and Elva would be very well endowed.

Very early in his married life, while his eldest daughter was still a babe in arms, and his younger ones were not yet in existence, Abel Force had been intrusted with the guardianship of a five-year-old boy—young Leonidas Force, the orphan son of his second cousin of the same name.

When several years had passed, and all hope of a male heir to send on the name with his old ancestral manor had faded away, it became the dearest wish of Abel Force's heart to unite his eldest daughter and his orphan cousin in marriage, so that Mondreer should not pass into another family.

With this object in view, he encouraged the affection that soon began to show itself between the boy and girl who were being brought up and educated in his home together.

He even sought to lead them to believe that they were destined for each other.

It is true that such a plan very seldom succeeds, perhaps not more than once in a hundred times, since the boy and girl so trained will, through the very perversity of human nature, if from no other cause, fall in love with any other boy or girl whom he or she may happen to meet, rather than with each other.

But in the case of these two young ones, Leonidas and Odalite, the plan succeeded to perfection.

The two children were attracted to each other, grew very fond of each other, became inseparable companions —seemed to have but one life between them.

Even total strangers, who knew nothing whatever of the family arrangements in regard to these children, observing their devotion to each other, would say:

"This boy and girl were made for one another. It would be a sin ever to part them. They are a perfect pair."

And Abel Force would smile and say nothing.

No one objected to his plan. But the faithful guardian, in justice to his ward, would not allow him to grow up with the demoralizing anticipation of marrying an heiress to live on her fortune.

After the boy had passed out of the hands of the family governess, and had taken a course in Charlotte Hall College, his guardian called on him to make choice of some profession.

Le unhesitatingly chose the navy.

So, after some considerable trouble and expense, Mr. Force succeeded in getting the youth sent to the Naval Academy at Annapolis.

It happened about the same time that Abel Force was elected as a State senator, and went with his family to spend the winter in the State capital. So the young people were not separated. The end of the legislative session was, also, so near the commencement of the long summer's vacation of the Naval Academy, that Mr. Force, with his family, always remained over in the city for the exercises, at the close of which he took his ward with him to Mondreer.

This habit continued year after year, until Leonidas Force had completed his course at the academy, and had graduated with honors.

Then he accompanied his guardian and the family

home for the last time, to spend a brief leave of absence before starting on his first long sea voyage.

Leonidas was now about eighteen years of age, and Odalite about thirteen.

During that short visit home the two young people became more inseparable companions than ever.

That they were destined for each other was well known to everybody, and so well understood by themselves that no formal word on the subject was spoken between them, or thought necessary to be spoken.

They seemed to know and feel that they belonged to each other forever and ever.

Only when the day of parting came—of parting "for three eternal years," as they put it in their despair—Odalite cried as if her heart would break, and refused to be comforted; and Midshipman Leonidas Force, U. S. N., disgraced his uniform by crying a little for company. But then, "the bravest are the tenderest."

This was just three years before the opening of our story.

After their separation the young pair corresponded as frequently as possible under the circumstances.

Their letters were not love letters, in the usual acceptation of that term. They were frank, outspoken, affectionate letters, such as might have passed between a brother and sister who loved one another faithfully, and knew no fonder ties; letters which Odalite read with delight to father and mother, governess and sisters.

All went on in this way for the first two years.

The third year was an eventful one in the destiny of the young pair.

Early in the spring of that year occurred the death of Miss Laura Notley, a very aged lady, great-aunt of young Leonidas Force, to whom by will she left her large plantation, known as Greenbushes, appointing Mr. Abel Force trustee of the estate during the minority of the heir.

This rich inheritance constituted the young midshipman a much more eligible *parti* for the youthful heiress of Mondreer than he had previously been considered.

Even Mrs. Force acknowledged that she was satisfied as she had never quite been before this.

The two plantations of Mondreer and Greenbushes joined, both fronting on the bay, and together would form perhaps the richest estate in the commonwealth.

And now, when Leonidas should return from his voyage, he might resign from the navy, and, as he would by that time have reached his majority, he might marry Odalite, after which the young couple might take up their residence at Greenbushes and live there during the lifetime of their parents.

This would certainly be a most delightful arrangement for all parties.

Letters were promptly written to Leonidas, both by his guardian and by his sweetheart, informing him of his good fortune and congratulating him on his happy prospects.

Odalite, in her crazy letter, wrote:

"I am so wild with delight that I am dancing when I am not writing, and the reason why is this—that now you need never go to sea again, and we shall never, never, never part more this side of heaven!

"You will give up your profession, but you need not be idle. You must not be, father says. You must look after the plantation, which has been neglected during the dear old lady's life; you must reclaim the worn-out soil; farm the land on scientific principles, with the aid of chemistry and machinery and things, and improve the stock by importing new what's-er-names. Oh, you will have plenty to do to keep you from moldering away alive, if you look after your estate as father does after his.

"And neither shall I be idle. I shall look after the

house, the servants, the kitchen, the dairy, the poultry yard and the garden, as mother—no—as mother does not look after hers—but, then, I am a plain, country girl, and mamma is a grand duchess, or she ought to be. I must now stop to dance. I can't keep still any longer. When I have done dancing I will finish this letter."

The remainder of Odalite's epistle need not be quoted. It may be guessed.

Every one was perfectly satisfied. No one dreamed of suggesting or even desiring the slightest change in these perfect arrangements.

The spring passed in delightful anticipations.

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## CHAPTER III

### OLD ACQUAINTANCES

But, unhappily, in the height of midsummer, Abel Force, believing that he acted from the purest motives of affection, but—no doubt—as the event proved, deceived and misled by the enemy of mankind, proposed to take all his family for a tour which should include the White Mountains, the Lakes, the St. Lawrence River, the Thousand Islands and Niagara Falls.

Mrs. Force, who had long lost her morbid dread of public resorts, willingly agreed to the proposed journey.

About the middle of July the party set out. They traveled very leisurely, enjoying every foot of land and every ripple of water they passed over.

It was late in August when at length they reached Niagara. They took rooms at the Cataract House, and spent a week in making excursions through the magnificent scenery around the Falls.

It was in the first days of September that something

of very grave import to the future of the happy family occurred at their hotel.

The whole party, together with many of the guests of the house, were out on one of the grand piazzas overlooking the rapids. They remained out enjoying the sublime and almost terrific scene until the sun set and the moon arose.

Then Mrs. Force, dreading the dampness of the September evening over the water for her children, led the way into the house, followed by all her party.

They went into the brilliantly lighted public parlor.

As she was crossing the room, leaning on her husband's arm and followed by her children and their governess, she suddenly started and turned pale.

Mr. Force, who felt her start, but did not see the sudden blanching of her cheek, looked up and saw a stranger approaching them from the opposite side of the parlor.

He was a short, stout, fair-haired, rosy-faced, blue-eyed man of middle age and pleasant aspect, in a fashionable evening dress.

He came up with a frank smile, holding out his hand, and exclaiming:

"Lady Elfrida Glennon! This is really a delightful surprise!"

The haughty beauty shuddered, but almost immediately commanded herself and received her accoster's effusive address with cold politeness, and then said:

"Let me present you to my husband and daughters. Mr. Force—Col. Anglesea, of the Honorable East India Company's Service. Col. Anglesea—my husband, Mr. Abel Force, of Mondreer, Maryland. Our daughters, Miss Force, Miss Wynnette, Miss Elva, Miss Meeke."

While bows were being exchanged the lady quite recovered her self-possession. The party took seats near together, the colonel dropping into a lounging-chair immediately opposite the sofa on which Mrs. Force sat

with her daughters—and saying something poetic and complimentary about a perfect rose surrounded by fresh buds, as he gazed upon the beautiful mother and children.

Mr. Force, who occupied another armchair near them, seemed the best pleased of all the group.

"I am really very happy to make your acquaintance, colonel. This is the first time in our rather long married life—look at those great girls!—that I have had the pleasure of meeting any of my wife's English friends. I hope we shall see a great deal of you. I hope to persuade you to visit us at Mondreer for a few weeks before you return to your native land," he said, with all his honest, friendly soul in every look and tone.

"Thanks, very much. I shall be but too well pleased. Yes! it is nearly twenty years since we saw each other last, yet the moment I entered this room I recognized Lady Elfrida," he said.

"Pardon me," coldly objected the lady. "When I married a citizen of this republic, to live in it, I took my husband's style with his name, and am called Mrs. Force."

"Ah! true! precisely! perfectly so! A thousand apologies! I will try to remember."

And the colonel sank back in his chair.

He remained for about half an hour conversing with the family party, or rather, to report exactly, with Mr. Force, for neither Mrs. Force nor any other one of them contributed much to the conversation.

At length he arose, bowed and left them.

"A very agreeable man, indeed! A very entertaining companion! Well read and well traveled! Knows the world! Understands human nature! An old friend of yours, my dear?" said Abel Force, turning to his beautiful wife.

"An old acquaintance of my brother, rather. They

were in the same regiment in India," coldly replied the lady.

"Ah! but that is a strong bond of union between men. Your brother's comrade in the Indian campaign! He is traveling now on a long furlough, he says. We must see more of him, good fellow! We must have him down for a few weeks at Mondreer."

"No!" impulsively sprang from the lady's heart; but the word did not pass her whitening lips. She suppressed the exclamation, sent back the strong objection to hide in her bosom among other heavy secrets there, and—kept silence.

The honest and honorable man, who had no mysteries of his own and never suspected them in another, did not observe his wife's agitation. He was not looking toward her, in fact, he was looking down on his own clasped fingers and idly twirling thumbs, and thinking of the good time he was going to have with his wife's old friend and his own new acquaintance.

"Yes," he went dreaming on and murmuring half to himself, "we must certainly have him down to Mondreer for the autumn, and show him what Maryland country life is like! I reckon he will find it more like old England than anything he has seen in America. He is the first countryman of yours, my dear, who has ever fallen in our way since we left England, and we must make the most of him! Especially as he is not only a countryman, but an old friend."

So saying, Abel Force arose and sauntered off to see if the evening mail had come in.

Mrs. Force had sent off her children to bed, in charge of their eldest sister and the governess, while she herself remained in the empty parlor, walking up and down its whole length, and trying to think what would be her best course in the present crisis.

She had, for the time being, the room all to herself. The other guests of the house were either in their own

apartments, or on the piazzas, overlooking the rapids, or at tea, or abroad. At any rate, the lady was alone, until she was joined by the colonel, who came confidently, not to say impudently, up to her side.

"Angus Anglesea! how did you dare to recognize and accost me?" she demanded, her blue eyes blazing with indignation.

"Because I was so surprised and delighted to see you, Friday!" he replied, with gay defiance.

"I should think the sight of me would blast your eyes!"

"Don't swear, Friday! At least, don't swear in that way. 'Blast your eyes' is a low, seafaring phrase. I know it is provoking to have me come, when you had got away so far and felt so secure! Well, it was as great a shock to me! By Jove! we looked at each other for a moment like a pair of ghosts! Didn't we? But talking of 'blasts,' I don't mind confessing that the sight of you did nearly strike me blind, but it was through your dazzling beauty! By Jove, Friday, you are ten thousand times handsomer now than you were when you turned the head of His Royal——"

"Be silent! If you dare to name that devil to me again——"

"Quite so! I am dumb! I am mute. But don't use strong language, Friday! It is bad form. You must have picked up the habit in America."

"Look you here, Angus Anglesea! Mr. Force intends to invite you to visit us at our country house, down in Maryland."

"He has invited me. Deuced kind of him! And I have accepted the invitation," put in the colonel, twirling his light mustache.

"You will not go. You will have the decency to avoid the roof of an honorable man."

The colonel's face flushed crimson. His brow darkened with anger. For a moment he lost even the super-

ficial semblance of a gentleman, and showed himself a ruffian in tone and manner.

"Look you, my Lady Elfrida! You take a dangerous tone toward me who holds your fate in the grip of his hand!" he exclaimed, stretching out his arm, and working his fingers. "Yes, and who would not hesitate, under provocation, to tighten that grip to your destruction. But there! We should serve, not ruin, each other. Now listen to me, Friday. If you will behave yourself, I will hold my tongue. Otherwise—— But I need say no more. You understand me."

"I understand you to be an unmitigated villain!" muttered the lady, fiercely, between her clenched teeth—"an incarnate fiend!"

"You flatter me; you do, really. You elevate my self-respect. How I shall enjoy your conversation at—at—— What is the name of your principality or grand duchy down in Maryland? I am told that your great plantations down in the South are quite equal in wealth, population and extent of territory to our lesser European sovereignties. What is the name of the place to which I am invited, and where I intend to go?"

"Why do you wish to know the name of our happy home? Why do you wish to enter our Eden, like another serpent, to destroy it?" exclaimed the lady, beside herself with fear and wrath.

"There you go again, Friday! You will not drop that bad habit of flattering a modest man to his face. I declare you will make me vain."

"Why do you wish to trouble me? Why do you wish to come to Mondreer?" she inquired, wringing her hands.

"Oh, ho! You have come down from your tragics. Mondreer, is it? And why do I go? Well, to be frank with you, I go to browse upon

" 'Fresh fields and pastures green.' "

"I understand. You think the simple, honest, country gentlemen will be easier prey for your gamester's snares than are the men you meet at public resorts. And you mean to swindle and fleece them," scornfully replied the lady.

Again the man's face flushed with anger, but he controlled his temper, and laughed, saying:

"What a genius you have for compliment, Friday! You should have been a courtier, where your talents might have been turned to the best advantage; or a king's favorite. Ah! but there we tread on delicate ground, do we not?"

"I warn you, Col. Anglesea, not to drive me too far! For sooner than submit to your insults, I will throw myself upon my husband's mercy, and claim his protection against you."

"Oh! You will go to him, and tell him that 'tale of old times' of which you were the heroine? And in his love he will forgive you. And so far so well. But, then, suppose I also should tell that little story to *all* and sundry? How would it be then?" sneered the man.

"Oh! fiend! fiend!" breathed the woman through her white lips and closed teeth.

"Quite so. You only do me justice. I shall enjoy your conversation at Mondreer."

"And you go there to rob my husband and our unsuspicious neighbors at the card table. But you will be disappointed. Mr. Force does not know one card from another, and his friends seldom or never play."

"What barbarians must be the people of your principality, Friday! I must really go there as a missionary to teach them the arts of civilized life. Ah! in good time. Here comes his serene highness. Let us smooth our ruffled plumage, else he may be asking inconvenient questions," whispered the colonel, as Abel Force smilingly approached them.

"Ah! You here, colonel? That is right. We'll all

go down to tea together. I feel really so delighted to have met with an old friend of my wife that I cannot bear to lose sight of him. We must leave here on Monday. Now, my dear colonel, could you not arrange your affairs so as to accompany us? If your plan of travel would admit of your giving us the pleasure of your company on our return journey, we should be really delighted, you know. The hunting season will soon be on, and I could show you some fine sport," said Mr. Force.

And then seeing his eldest daughter enter the room, he drew her arm within his own and smilingly waved his hand to the colonel to take Mrs. Force and lead the way to the tea room.

But the lady refused to see the signal, took the arm of her governess, Miss Meeke, and went on, the colonel walking persistently beside her.

"What do you hunt in your grand duchy, sir? Buffalo? Bears? Wolves?" inquired the colonel, when they were all seated at the table.

"No," laughed Mr. Force, good-humoredly. "You would have to go a thousand miles to the west for that game, colonel. We hunt just what you do in England—with a difference—we hunt foxes and hares, and sometimes deer. Oh, we will show you! You will think yourself back in old England. Come. Shall we consider the matter settled?" cordially demanded Mr. Force.

"Thanks very much. I shall be too happy to make one of your traveling party. I will go."

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## CHAPTER IV

### A DANGEROUS GUEST

"Remember," said the munificent Marylander to his new acquaintance, when they were about to start, "my

wife's old friend is my guest from the moment we leave this hotel."

Which words being translated into practice, meant that Mr. Force, from the time the party left the Cataract House, paid all the colonel's traveling expenses from Niagara to Mondreer—even though they lingered at several pleasant stopping places and took the Adirondacks on their way.

The frank and obliging colonel not being afflicted with any delicate sensibilities, made not the slightest objection to having all his bills paid by his host, nor felt the least hesitation in borrowing all the money he wanted, using various pretexts of delayed remittances, and so forth, all of which excuses the straightforward and unsuspicious Marylander believed, feeling well pleased to be his guest's banker.

It was the first of October when the travelers finally reached Mondreer.

Arrived there, Col. Anglesea took possession of the mansion with the most engaging condescension and continued to borrow money of his host with the most charming affability.

He had, besides, a frank, bluff, soldierly manner, which pleased the country neighbors and won their confidence. He easily ran into debt at the country stores and pleasantly won money at cards from the simple, young men who thought it an honor to lose their cash to such a very great nabob and very fine gentleman.

Meanwhile he kept a sharp lookout for rich young men to fleece and some rich heiress to marry.

Abel Force, in his frank, cordial, unsuspicious hospitality, gave hunting breakfasts, dinner parties and oyster suppers in honor of his English guest, and invited all the best people in the county to meet him.

Col. Anglesea, from his pleasing person and agreeable manners, entertaining conversation, and fund of information and anecdote, became very popular in the

neighborhood, and the county gentry feasted and lionized him to his heart's content.

But the longed-for heiress did not seem to be forthcoming.

All the young ladies to whom he was introduced had fathers and mothers in the prime of life who bade fair to outlive the handsome colonel himself by many years, and ever so many brothers and sisters.

Indeed, large families seemed to be the rule in that neighborhood, and only daughters who were heiresses the exception that could nowhere be found.

It was strange that in all his search for a girl with expectations the colonel had never thought of Odalite.

But, then, she was only sixteen years of age, and she looked much younger. She seemed to be merely the eldest child among children.

One day early in December an event occurred that opened his eyes. A letter arrived from foreign parts that gave the whole family, and especially Odalite, the greatest pleasure. She ran about with it open in her hands, and read it to her parents, to her sisters, and even to her governess.

Col, Anglesea, in his self-absorption, took not the slightest interest in this family jubilee and felt not the least curiosity concerning the letter which had caused it.

But Mr. Force, in the generous exuberance of his nature, wished to share his pleasure with all others, and so, joining his guest in a walk over the frozen fields that winter morning, he smiled and said:

"We have just received a letter from my ward and cousin, Midshipman Leonidas Force, who has been at sea for the last three years, but is now homeward bound and is expected to arrive in time for Christmas; and then I should not wonder if we should have to celebrate a New Year's wedding," he added.

"Ah! So the young gentleman is engaged. And who

is the young lady?" inquired the colonel, making an effort to appear interested.

"Why! is it possible you don't know? I thought everybody knew!" exclaimed the father, looking surprised.

"But I, you must remember, am a comparative stranger, and I am ignorant."

"Well, then, of course, the lady in question is my eldest daughter, a very little lady as yet."

"Miss Force! Why, she is a mere schoolgirl! She must have been a little child when he went away, if he has been gone three years," said Col. Anglesea, in surprise; and then he fell into musing.

"She is sixteen now, and she was thirteen when he sailed. Of course there was no formal engagement between them then—there could not have been, you know; but it was understood! You see, sir, it is a family matter! The children have been brought up together with a view to their future union. They are certainly very fond of each other. Their marriage is a very desirable one on every account. As I have no son, my eldest daughter will inherit this manor—one of the oldest and largest in Maryland, and one which has been in the family since the first settlement of the province, more than two hundred years ago, when Aaron Force, who came over with Leonard Calvert, received a grant of the land —a thousand acres, then. We have not lost an acre in all these generations, but rather gained a third more. There are fifteen hundred acres now. All this must 'fall to the distaff' and go out of the family unless my daughter should marry her cousin, Leonidas Force. He also has recently inherited a considerable estate, joining this, and, like this, with a long sea front. It is not always that young people submit to be guided by their elders in the matter of marriage, but I am happy to say that my boy and girl have very readily taken our views of the case and will follow them. So they will probably be married

very early in the new year, and the old ancestral estate will not pass out of the old family name."

"I see," said the colonel, "and I heartily congratulate you on the prospect."

Then he fell into deep thought. Presently he said:

"She has not seen her lover for three years, since she was a child?"

"No, not since she was thirteen."

"When is he expected to return?"

"About Christmas."

"Ah, yes! You told me! She is very young to be married."

"Yes; but we do marry our girls very young when everything else is suitable—as in this case," smiled Mr. Force.

"But after three years of separation from the youth whom she parted with in her childhood, may not your daughter have changed her mind?"

"Oh, no!" earnestly replied the father.

"But you cannot know this until the young pair meet again. Suppose now, for instance, that when Miss Force sees the youth she may not like the idea of marrying him? What, in such a case, would be your line of policy?"

"I should have no policy. My dear daughter's happiness should be my first consideration, and the marriage could not go on."

"Exactly. That is just what I should expect of you," said the colonel, approvingly.

"Good fellow!" thought honest Abel Force, admiringly.

"But such is not likely to be the case, colonel. She is quite fond of him as he is of her."

"Quite so," assented the colonel, as they turned and walked toward the house.

On reaching it, Mr. Force went in; but Col. Anglesea

excused himself, and remained on the outside. He wanted to walk up and down.

Here was the very heiress he had been in search of right under his eyes all the time, and he had never seen her. He had thought her a child of about fourteen years of age, and here she was sixteen, and considered marriageable.

How precocious these young American girls were, to be sure! How very early they were married!

At this point the colonel lighted a fresh cigar, strolled out upon the frozen lawn, and sat down on a rustic seat, under the branches of an old yew tree, from which he had a view of the bay, that here spread out from the foot of the hill to the distant horizon.

It was not, however, to look at the prospect of nature before his eyes, but to contemplate the prospect of the future in his imagination, that he sat there, and smoked and reflected.

"The game is in my own hands," he said to himself. "The daughter is governed entirely by the mother, whom she adores. And she must appear to act from her own free will and for her own pleasure, in order to obtain the consent of her father, who, forsooth, will sacrifice his own family ambition to his child's happiness.

"This is the third of December," he mused, "and the young fellow is expected to be home at Christmas. There is no time to be lost. I must turn the screws on my lady. There shall be a New Year's wedding at Mondreer, but Mr. Leonidas Force shall not be the happy bridegroom."

## CHAPTER V

### GREENBUSHES

GLAD voices broke in upon Anglesea's brooding.

He looked up, and saw coming toward him the three young daughters of the house—Odalite, Wynnette and Elva, attended by their governess, Miss Meeke.

They were all equipped in their warm, brown cloth coats, buttoned up before, and their brown, beaver poke bonnets tied under their chins. They carried little baskets in their hands and dragged along sticks after them.

"Will you take a walk with us through the woods this morning, Col. Anglesea? Father has gone into town to attend court, you know; and mother has a little headache, and has locked herself up in her room to lie down and sleep. And we are going for a walk. Will you go?" inquired Odalite, as graciously as she could force herself to do; for the girl secretly detested the interloper, though her native good breeding prevented her from ever betraying her feelings to their object. She had not failed to perceive, through her own fine sympathies rather than through any expression from Mrs. Force, that the lady was very much annoyed and distressed by the presence of this intruder into the privacy of her domestic circle; and so Odalite often quietly relieved her mother by taking charge of the visitor's entertainment, as she did on this occasion by inviting him to join their walking party.

Col. Anglesea looked at her with an amused smile, yet with more attention than he had ever regarded her before.

"Will you come with us?" she inquired again, seeing that he hesitated to reply.

"Thanks, very much! It is a temptation, Miss Force. In what direction to you propose to walk?"

"Down the hill to the shore—then along the shore for three miles to Greenbushes," replied the young lady.

"And then through the house, which is to be Le's and Odalite's home after New Year, when they are married," volunteered Wynnette, a pretty, saucy little brunette of fourteen years.

"Wynnette! Wynnette! Hush!" exclaimed Odalite, blushing vividly.

"Why must I hush? Everybody knows Le is coming home to marry you at Christmas!" retorted the second sister.

"And what do you think, Col. Anglesea?" whispered Elva, a gentle, little blonde of twelve.

"What, my elf?" playfully inquired the colonel.

"Why, when Le and Odalite get married and go to live at Greenbushes, Wynnette and I will live there just as much as we shall at home here."

"Indeed! and what will Mr. Brother-in-law say to that?"

"Who, Le? Why, Le will say he is very glad. Le loves us all dearly. Le would give us anything we want, or do anything in the world for us. Especially now I should think he would, when we are going to let him have our sister and take her away."

"Elva, my dear, you are talking too much," whispered Miss Meeke, a small, demure young woman, with a pale face, gray eyes and smooth brown hair.

"Why? When he wants to pretend that our Le will not be glad to have us all three to live with him? I must take Le's part, you know, Miss Meeke, especially in his absence," pleaded Elva.

"Shall we walk on, Col. Anglesea?" suggested Odalite, to put an end to an embarrassing conversation.

"Certainly, if you please. What are these sticks for?" inquired the colonel, referring to the wands the girls dragged behind them.

"Oh! these are to thresh the chincapin bushes, when

we get there! And we expect to fill our baskets!" answered Wynnette.

"Can I not carry them for you?" he inquired; and without waiting for an answer, collected the sticks from the children, who not unwillingly gave them up.

"And now I think of it," suggested the colonel, "you will require but one stick, and that I will use and thresh the bushes while you gather the nuts. See, I will leave these three here, and take this thickest one. Now give me the four baskets; I will hang them on my stick and sling them over my shoulder, thus," he said, suiting the action to the word.

The two children laughed at the figure he cut.

"Now! Right face! Forward! March!" he cried, stepping out in front.

They left the lawn by the east gate and passed through an orchard where a few late winter apples still clung to the nearly leafless branches of the trees; opened another gate and entered a narrow path leading down through the thick woods to the shore.

Then they turned southward and walked by the side of the bay, the children chattering as they went.

"What do you think, Col. Anglesea?" inquired Elva.

"I don't know. What ought I to think?" laughingly inquired their escort.

"Well, I'll tell you. Although Greenbushes is only three miles off, we have never seen it in our lives."

"Really, now?"

"No, never! Miss Notley, Le's great-aunt, who owned the place and who left it to Le in her will, never lived here at all. She left the place in the care of old Mr. Beever, her overseer, and he and the negroes worked the land and raised the crops, and Mr. Copp, her lawyer, attended to the sale and shipping of the tobacco and—and all that, you know."

"I see."

"And Miss Notley lived on her other place down in

Florida. At least, she lived there all the year round except the summer months, when she always went to Europe. She died in Florida, and left Felicia—her estate there—to her Florida relations."

"Ah!" said the colonel, trying to seem interested, while really brooding over his own schemes.

"And she left Greenbushes to Le, who is the only relative by her mother's side."

"Quite so."

"And it is a great thing for Le and Odalite, for now they can marry and settle at once."

"Precisely."

"And as Wynnette and I shall spend half our time at Greenbushes, we mean to pick out our room and choose the paper and furniture for it."

"In—deed!"

"Oh, yes! Mr. Copp sent to New York and got illustrated catalogues from the furniture dealers and books of patterns from the paper hangers, and samples from the—the—the—oh! what do you call them, Wynnette?—the people who color the walls that are not papered, you know?"

"The kalsominers?"

"Yes, that is what I mean! And all sorts of things! And we are going to choose our room and have it fixed!"

"Without consulting Mr. Brother-in-law?"

"Of course! Why, it is all to be done at once—at once! It is to be completed and quite ready by the time Le gets home! Won't that be jolly? Le wrote to Odalite to do just as she pleased with the house, and wrote to Mr. Copp to advance all the money that was necessary and give her all the advice and assistance that he could. So father wrote to Mr. Copp to meet us here to-day, and he is to do it. Father would have been here, too, but he was subpœnaed this very morning to attend court. Oh! do look at that flock of wild geese, colonel! I'm glad you haven't got your gun and dogs this time!"

So chattering and letting their tongues run before their wit, the children, with their companions, reached Greenbushes, and turning from the shore, began to ascend the hill going toward the house, which stood on the summit a few hundred yards back from the bay, and in the midst of a grove of pines, cedars, yews, firs and every description of evergreens that would grow on the soil; so that winter, as well as summer, the mansion was sheltered, and the lawn was heavily shaded by a canopy of green trees; hence its name of Greenbushes, given when these same trees were but saplings.

The house, in the midst of this evergreen grove, was a building of hard, dark red bricks, and so irregular in construction as to defy all description; it had so many gable ends, tall chimneys, little dormer windows and latticed windows, as to confuse the spectator; and so many great doors, each with its own portico, as to make a strange visitor utterly uncertain concerning the whereabouts of the main entrance.

Two old men, standing on a three-cornered portico in an angle of the wall, drew the steps of the visitors thither, where they were met my Mr. Copp, a tall, thin, fair-faced, gray-haired lawyer, and Mr. Beever, a short, round, red-faced and bald-headed farmer.

Both were plainly dressed in business suits of heavy, black cloth.

"Do you know those persons?" inquired the colonel of Odalite.

"No, but I know who they are, and I have come to see them."

"Then let me speak to them first," he suggested, going up to the two men.

He addressed them in a low tone, and then brought them to the spot where Odalite and her companions waited.

"Miss Force," he said, "this is Mr. Copp, legal steward of the late Miss Laura Notley. This is Mr. Beever,

manager of the plantation. They wish to speak to you on business, and will show you into the house," he said.

The two men bowed very deferentially.

Odalite received them politely, and at Mr. Copp's invitation, followed them into the building, accompanied by her sisters, their governess and Col. Anglesea, who regarded all these proceedings with a sarcastic smile.

The lawyer led the whole party into a small, old-fashioned, oak-paneled parlor, with a chimney in the angle of the wall, in which a large, wood fire had been kindled, and near which a table and a few chairs had been placed.

On this table lay various books of samples, and patterns, and catalogues of prices.

"Will you sit down and look over these, or will you go through the house first? I have had fires built in all the rooms, but still I think the place is not thoroughly aired and dried yet," said Mr. Copp.

"We will look over these first, and then take them through the house for reference," replied Odalite.

And the whole party sat down around the table, and began to examine patterns, samples and prices.

A great chattering as of many magpies ensued.

There was a difference of opinion. For kalsomine, and for the ground work of wall paper, as well as for window curtains, and chair and sofa colors, Odalite and Miss Meeke preferred olive, sage, lavender and other delicate, neutral tints, while Wynnette and Elva loudly advocated, pink, blue and yellow, or crimson, purple and orange.

At length, without arriving at any mutual understanding, but being rested from their long walk, they all arose to go through the house. Such a rambling house! with stairs going up and stairs going down in such out-of-the-way places; doors opening into rooms in such unexpected quarters; when they thought they were going to look into a small closet they found a large chamber; and when they walked through a side passage, which

they thought led outdoors on a porch, behold! it led into some wing containing more rooms.

Wynnete and Elva chose at least half a dozen different rooms in succession—this, because it had such a lovely little fireplace and mantelpiece; that, because it had such funny little cupboards; the other, because it had such quaint little windows.

Finally they gave up in despair, saying that they must think it over at home before they could choose among so many.

Odalite, who thought that there was no time to lose if the house was to be ready for Leonidas on his return, selected the wall paper and the suits of furniture for all the rooms from the patterns before her, and having carefully marked them and written her directions, she requested Mr. Copp to set the mechanics to work at once, and to hurry on the repairs as fast as justice to the business would permit.

And Col. Anglesea, watching these proceedings, smiled sarcastically.

Having done their errand at Greenbushes, the little party left the house.

"Mr. Beever! Oh! please, where are the big chincapin thickets we have heard so much about?" inquired Elva, in whose ideas these nuts were, after all, the most immediately important item in their errand to the farm.

"Yes, honey, you'll find 'em all along both sides of the footpath through the woods betwixt here and your place, but 'specially where you cross Chincapin Creek."

"The woods! There! We'll have to go back that way. Ah, Col. Anglesea, how lovely it will be when Odalite and Leonidas live here! There are so many lovely ways of going between the two places. Just listen now while I tell you. We may walk by the shore, as we did this morning, or we may walk through the woods, as we shall this afternoon. We may ride horseback along the shore or through the woods, or we may drive in a carriage

along the shore or along the turnpike road through the woods; or, best of all, we may row in a boat from the landing at the foot of our hill to the landing at the foot of this hill. Oh, it will be perfectly delightful!"

Col. Anglesea looked at the child with his sinister smile, but she was too happy to notice anything evil in it.

They took leave of the lawyer and the farmer, and started to walk home through the woods, chattering all the way of the beauty of Greenbushes even now, and the delight of the prospect ahead.

"It is too late this season; but mind, Odalite, next spring you are to have a mansard roof, and bay windows, and—balconies, and—and—towers and things," said Elva.

"Perhaps," quietly replied Odalite.

"Why, there is no 'perhaps' about it! Le said you were to do just as you please with the house," suggested Wynnette.

"But that did not mean I should burn it down," said Odalite.

"Of course it did not. What do——"

"And he did not mean I should tear it down either, as I should have to do to make all the improvements our ambitious little Elva suggests. Why, darling, we might as well talk of putting a mansard on the top of that clump of Scotch firs as on that irregularly built farmhouse."

"The top is about as uneven in height as a set of dinner casters, so we will give up the mansard roof. But do have a bay window and some balconies," said Elva.

"Perhaps," repeated Odalite.

So talking they reached the bridge crossing Chincapin Creek, with its fringe of richly laden bushes, and stopped to gather the nuts.

It took but a little while to fill all their baskets, after which they continued their homeward walk.

They reached Mondreer late in the afternoon.

Their father had returned from the courthouse. Their mother had recovered from her headache. And the delayed dinner was served.

During the meal, which at Mondreer was always a merry one, the talk still ran upon Greenbushes and its present and prospective attractions.

Col. Anglesea took litte part in the conversation, but he listened and smiled.

After dinner, and during the long winter evening that followed, he vainly sought an opportuity of speaking alone with Mrs. Force.

He did not fail because she shunned him, but because the little party kept together in the most persistent way, and he certainly could not ask Mrs. Force in the presence of all her family, to give him a private interview. He must wait his opportunity.

## CHAPTER VI

### "IN MY LADY'S CHAMBER"

THE next morning Col. Anglesea resolved to have a decisive conversation with Mrs. Force before the day should be over.

After breakfast he seated himself in the family parlor to await events.

Soon Mr. Force came in to him. He was booted and spurred for a ride.

"I am sorry to have to leave you again to-day, but you know a subpœna is a thing not to be defied," he said.

"Oh, don't mind me. Sorry to lose your company, but shall find something to do, no doubt," replied the colonel.

"I fear it would be quite useless to ask you to ride with me?"

"To court? To spend the day there? Yes, quite. I never permit myself to be bored if I can help it."

"Good-day, then."

"Good-day. I wish you a pleasant ride."

"Thank you," said Mr. Force. And he left the room.

Anglesea kept his seat, and waited for the entrance of Mrs. Force.

There was her workstand, her workbox, her easy-chair and her footstool, in their cozy corner between the open fire and the side window, but she did not come to occupy them.

He knew at length that she was voluntarily absenting herself, in order to avoid a *tête-à-tête* with him, to which, if she should come into the sitting room at this time of day, she would be obliged to subject herself, for at this hour all the children were in the schoolroom with their governess, and Odalite with them, helping their German lesson.

As soon as Col. Anglesea divined the reason of Mrs. Force's absence he resolved to lay a trap for her and catch her.

So he went out into the hall, loudly called on one of the men servants to saddle a horse for him, saying he was going to ride to the post office, made a great fuss putting on his overcoat, cap and gloves, and finally, when the horse was brought around to the door, threw himself into the saddle, and galloped away with so much clatter and bang that the lady, wherever she might be lurking, could not fail to hear and know that he had left the house.

And she did not fail to hear and know it; but she was so astonished at the unusual noise and confusion he made that she asked herself a question which she would not have asked another:

"Is the man intoxicated at this early hour of the morn-

ing, that he behaves in this very disorderly manner? Well, I am glad he is gone. I hope it is for all day."

So saying, she went downstairs to the sitting room, feeling secure against his intrusion.

She took up her work, a piece of silk embroidery, and began to trace the outline of the pattern, humming a little air to herself.

Less than half an hour had the lady sat at her needlework, when the door opened softly.

She heard the slight sound through the silence of the house, looked up, and saw Col. Anglesea enter the room and walk toward her.

She started as if she had seen an apparition, and impulsively exclaimed:

"I thought you were miles away! I thought you had gone out for the day!"

"You heard me gallop off? Doubtless. I took a brisk ride along the turnpike as far as Chincapin Creek, turned down its banks to the shore, cantered along until I reached the bridle path leading up to your stables, and then dismounted, leaving my horse with the groom, and walked to the house. It was a brisk run, but it has done me good," Col. Anglesea explained, as, uninvited, he drew a chair toward the fire and seated himself at Mrs. Force's worktable, facing her.

The lady gave her attention to the pattern of her embroidery, and made no reply.

"If you had foreseen my quick return—certainly, if you had foreseen my errand—I should not have found you here; you would have kept out of my way; and even if I had sent a message requesting to speak with you, you would have made some excuse to decline or to defer the interview."

"Perhaps I should. Why do you intrude upon my privacy, Col. Anglesea? What is it that you want now?" she inquired, with that blending of fear and defiance in

her tone and manner which fatally betrayed the weakness of her defenses.

"Friday, I wonder that you should dare to assume such airs toward me—a man who with one word could destroy you!" he answered.

"Knave and coward that you are! Brute and demon as you are! you will not speak that word here!" she muttered, intensely, under her breath, as she fixed her blazing blue eyes upon him.

"There you go with your extravagant compliments again. You always were such a fascinating flatterer, Friday," said the man, coolly taking up one of her spools of silk and unwinding and rewinding it. "But as to that 'one word,' I certainly shall whisper it into Abel Force's ear, and also into the ears of that many-headed, mighty magician known to us all as 'Our Reporter,' when he shall come to me, notebook and lead pencil in hand, to interview me, and hear all the particulars, after the explosion shall be over."

"And do you presume to suppose that you will be suffered to live after that?" demanded the lady.

"Possibly not. In which case somebody else would have to be interviewed; but that would not help your cause. Come, Friday; the only possible salvation for you will be your full agreement to my terms of silence."

"Oh! you unmitigated villain!"

"Quite so. I am no halfway weakling, as you know perfectly well—for there are no secrets between us, Friday. You know, and therefore I need not remind you, that I never stop at any means to gain an end. I have an end in view just now. It is the price of my silence."

"I wonder what new felonies you can possibly be meditating now?" bitterly demanded the lady, in spite of her fears.

" 'What new'—what was the word?"

"Felonies! you ruthless fiend!"

"Ah! Certainly! Thanks! You are too good to say

so! Ah—the—enterprise I have in hand just now is one in which you will promptly and zealously give me all the help you possibly can—such effectual assistance, in point of fact, as shall insure its success."

"And if I do not?"

"'If you do not?' I have already told you the consequences. But you are slow to believe them. You do not really believe me to be so thorough-going as you have been good enough to say that I am. You think that at the last there will be some relenting on my part. Disabuse yourself of that illusion. Friday, listen to me: No condemned criminal standing on the trapdoor of a scaffold ever occupied a more dangerous position than you do now. Refuse to co-operate with me in my purpose, and I give the signal that seals your fate—I spring the trap that lets you drop at once into perdition. That is all, my lady."

"And yet," groaned Elfrida Force, clasping her hands convulsively together—"and yet neither I nor any one related to me have ever broken any law of the land, or have ever been accused or even suspected of breaking one."

"That should be a most precious and comforting reflection, Friday, especially if I should be obliged to spring that trap. Many unhappy victims have met their doom with fortitude and resignation under such circumstances."

"Cease! you dastard, cease!" cried the lady, wringing her hands. "Be silent! or tell me what it is you want, so I may know the worst at once!"

"Quite so. I will not only be silent now, but I will be mute henceforth. Yea, I will be dumb forever!—that is, on certain conditions."

"What conditions? Why can't you name them? Are they so infamous that even you shrink from telling me? In a word, what do you want?"

"'In a word,' then: I want—Odalite," coolly replied the colonel.

The lady gazed at the man with eyes slowly dilating with horror.

"Odalite!" she gasped, under her breath.

"Yes, if you please. I hear that the girl is considered marriageable. I hear also a rumor to the effect that she may possibly be married to that young midshipman who is expected home at Christmas—unless I supplant him, which I hope to do, for she cannot care for him really, you know, since they parted when they were boy and child."

"But she does care for him. She loves him as he loves her. They have always been devoted to each other," indignantly retorted Elfrida Force.

The colonel laughed insolently.

"Boy and girl love! Puppy love! Pigeon love! We will soon change all that."

"If she did not care at all for Leonidas Force, still I know it is utterly impossible she should ever care for you."

"I would make her love me—or pretend to do so."

"Even if she were to become so deranged in mind, so demoralized in heart as to love you, I should never consent to such a monstrous marriage!" passionately declared Elfrida Force.

"Oh, yes you would! You will, when you realize that unless you do, your family peace and honor, your social position and prosperity—all you prize and pride yourself upon—must suddenly fall and bury you and yours under their ruins. Are you prepared to meet such a catastrophe? Indeed, to pull down destruction upon yourself, your husband, your daughters—all whom you love and cherish? Are you prepared to see your name blazoned all over the world as the subject of an unexampled scandal in high life? Are you prepared to see your husband and daughters—die of—— Who can foresee their

fate? Are you willing that this discovery should wreck and destroy your home and your family, root and branch, and leave nothing of you but the memory of one dishonored name behind? Are you ready to incur all this irremediable woe and ruin? For be sure that in refusing me your daughter's hand, you do incur it."

"Do you think, reckless knave as you are! do you think, even if I were so lost to every sense of honor and decency as to wish to sacrifice my dear daughter, that she would ever be persuaded to become your wife?" said the lady, and her voice sounded hollow from the depths of her distress.

"Oh, yes! certainly! when she hears, as she must hear, if necessary, all that depends upon her consent."

"She would die rather than be faithless to her betrothed."

"Possibly, supposing that she cares for him—which is doubtful under the circumstances—she might die rather than discard him; but do you not see that she would discard him rather than bring upon her family unutterable misery and degradation?"

"Do you not see—ruthless fiend that you are! do you not know, even if I and my daughter were mad enough to favor your pretensions, that her father, who alone has the disposal of her hand, would never, never consent to forego his cherished plan of uniting his heiress with one of her own name, so that the family name may go down with the family estate to posterity—to give her to you, a stranger, an adventurer for aught he knows?"

"Most certainly he would—and he will, when he should believe, as he must be made to believe, that his dear daughter has ceased to care for that sailor whose very face she has almost forgotten, and that she has learned to love a certain gay and gallant soldier—has left the navy for the army, so to speak! And when he hears that her happiness, if you please—her happiness, depends upon her marriage with him! And so on and so

on! You know how to manage both father and daughter! I leave the matter entirely in your hands! But understand this—Odalite must be my wife before that young midshipman returns home to make trouble. And the marriage must be made to appear to everybody to be her own choice. You may give the girl as much or as little of your confidence as you see fit, only make her clearly comprehend the consequences of her refusal. When she accepts, as she must accept, my proposal, let her know and feel the absolute necessity of her seeming to wish the marriage, especially when in the presence of her father. You understand. It is useless to prolong a painful interview. I leave you to carry out my instructions," said the colonel; and rising, with a low bow, he left the room.

As soon as he was gone the miserable woman started up from her seat, clasped her hands above her head, and walked wildly up and down the room, muttering to herself like any maniac:

"Oh, wretch! wretch! wretch! to stretch me upon such a rack! to put me to such straits! If it were not for Abel! If it were not for my dear, noble, generous husband, I could brave the worst for myself—and, yes, even for my children! I could take them and go away into exile, poverty, obscurity. I could meet any fate for myself, or for them, rather than sacrifice my child to such a beast as Angus Anglesea! But—but—I cannot see Abel's noble head bowed in grief and shame! I cannot! I cannot So if the Minotaur persists in demanding the maiden, she must be thrown to him. There is no deliverance—no deliverance!"

## CHAPTER VII

### THE WOOD-WALK

The "Minotaur" did persist, you may be sure! A beautiful girl and a rich inheritance were not to be given up by him for any scruples of conscience or movements of pity.

He wooed Odalite in the face of her evident aversion, which soon grew to detestation.

He followed her about, joined her in her walks, surprised her in her solitude; he would take no hint from her avoidance, no offense at her coldness, no rebuff from her rudeness; but would take her hand with such a pressure, look at her with such a gaze, speak to her in such a tone as would make the girl's blood run cold with a horrible abhorrence which she could not comprehend.

This went on for a week before the affair came to a crisis.

She had stolen out of the house to avoid him. It was a splendid winter day, and very mild for the season.

She resolved to take a long walk through the woods, even so far as Chincapin Creek, a mile and a half away.

Calling the bulldog, Joshua, after her, she set out with a brisk step over the frozen ground, dry with stubble and shining with frost, and through the bare wood, still glittering with icicles, that were, however, fast melting under the sun's rays.

When she reached Chincapin Creek she sat down on a large stone, over which she had thrown an extra shawl, and she rested in the thought that there at least she might remain for a little time without being disturbed either by the intrusion of her "black beast" or by a summons to attend him.

But she was mistaken.

He, who had watched her every movement, and even

by some devilish inspiration seemed to know her every intention beforehand—he, lurking in the shade of the curtain, and looking from his chamber window, had seen her come out of the house, warmly dressed in her quaint walking suit of a brown cloth winter cloak "all buttoned up before," and brown beaver poke bonnet tied down under her chin, cross the lawn and pass out of the south gate toward the woods beyond—followed by the faithful house dog.

He knew instinctively why she had left the house and where she was going.

He waited until she had entered the wood, and then he left his hiding place, drew on his overcoat, took his hat and gloves, went downstairs and left the house in pursuit of her.

He walked fast until he came into the woods, where he heard her voice a few rods ahead of him talking to her dog.

Then he slackened his pace and walked softly behind her. The closeness of the undergrowth prevented him from catching even a glimpse of her little poke bonnet; but he still heard her talking to her dog.

Presently these sounds ceased, and he crept cautiously on and found her sitting on a stone at the further end of the rustic bridge that crossed Chincapin Creek, with the dog lying at her feet.

Joshua never could abide Anglesea, and his threatening growl was the first warning that Odalite had of the approach of her natural enemy.

"You should not walk alone in these woods, my dear Miss Force," he said, coming up to her side and leaning on the railing of the bridge as he bent over her.

"I am not alone. The dog is with me, and he would not let any one injure or even annoy me. See! if I had not now his head on my lap and my hands around his neck, he would fly at you even. Easy—easy, Joshua,

good fellow!" she added, softly caressing the guardian who was showing his teeth and muttering low thunder.

"I hope I do not annoy you, Miss Force," he pleaded, in a persuasive tone, as he bent nearer to her.

"If I speak the truth, Col. Anglesea, I must say that you certainly do," replied the girl, drawing the short ears of her dog through her fingers and watching the process as if it required care.

"In what way am I so unfortunate?"

"You know very well; you follow me wherever I go, and intrude on me when I wish to be alone. I am sorry to speak so to my dear father's guest; but you should remember that you are his guest and not his daughter's, and should give him a little of your society, instead of pressing it all upon me!"

"The steel must follow the magnet! The moth must fly to the flame! And I, beautiful Odalite, must follow you! I have no choice."

"You are talking absurdities, quite unworthy of a man of your age, Col. Anglesea," replied Odalite, without looking up, and unconsciously pulling her dog's ears so hard that even Joshua's great patience gave way, first in a deprecating whine that produced no effect; and then in a despairing howl that quickly brought his mistress to a sense of her cruelty. She apologized to the victim so earnestly and caressed him so tenderly that Joshua grew ashamed of his want of doghood, and began to assure his mistress, in eloquent dumb show, that it was all a misapprehension on her part; that he wasn't hurt at all; that she never did hurt him and never could; that, in face, he was howling at—well, at the squirrel over yonder on the tree; or, yes, at the turkey buzzard flying overhead.

Meanwhile Col Anglesea looked on in disgust.

"And do you think, my dear young lady, that this childish play is quite worthy of your years?" he inquired.

"Yes! quite!" she answered, gravely.

"Will you listen to me for a moment?"

"I would rather not, Col. Anglesea; but perhaps, after all, I had beter hear what you have to say and get it over. Then, probably, I shall have some peace."

He seated himself on the railing of the bridge, above and a little behind her. And then he made an ardent declaration of his love and an offer of his hand.

Odalite grew pale and cold as she listened to him, not in fear, but in wrath, disgust and abhorrence.

"Has my father authorized you to speak to me on this subject, Col. Anglesea?" she inquired, in a freezing tone, without looking at him.

"No, my dearest one; but your mother has."

Odalite shook her head with derisive incredulity. Col. Anglesea continued as if he had not seen her gesture:

"And I want your authority to speak to your father of these my most cherished hopes."

"Then, sir, you need not trouble him on the subject. I suppose, sir, that I ought to thank you for the honor you have done me by this offer, but I have to assure you that it is utterly impossible for me to accept it," she said, in the same icy tone, and without glancing toward him.

"Oh, why, my dear Miss Force?" he inquired, with an insinuating smile, as he bent down to look in her face.

But she kept her eyes averted, as she answered, coldly:

"Because I have long been engaged to my cousin, Mr. Leonidas Force, who is coming home at Christmas, when we shall be married and go to live at Greenbushes, as you know very well, Col. Anglesea, for you have heard the whole matter freely discussed. You know this so well that I am surprised at the inconsistency of your action in offering me your hand."

"That childish engagement, made so long ago—if it was ever formally made at all, which is doubtful—really amounts to nothing whatever! It could form no obstacle to your union with me."

"You mistake, sir Although the engagement was not

formal, it was so well understood that all the preparations have been ordered and begun by both parties. But that you may clearly understand me, Col. Anglesea, and that you may drop this matter at once and forever, I must assure you that if I were entirely free I could never accept your offer, because I could never like you well enough."

Notwithstanding her decided refusal and frank explanation, Anglesea would take no denial, but continued to press his odious suit, until at length Joshua, seeing his mistress' distress, and knowing who caused it, started up and made a spring at the man's throat. Quick as lightning Odalite seized the dog by the collar and drew him down.

"You see," she said, "if you continue to persecute me, I shall not be able to keep the dog off you. I think you had better go home."

"And I think you had better quiet that brute! For if he should attack me again, I shall shoot him dead," exclaimed Anglesea, savagely, drawing a small revolver from his pocket and holding it in his hand.

The girl looked up at the man for the first time since they had met in the wood, but it was with a gaze so fearless, so full of scorn, that the ruffian's eyes fell beneath it.

"Come, Joshua, good dog, let us go home. We have 'fallen among thieves' this morning. Our woods are no longer safe for you and me. They are infested with brigands! Do you know what a brigand is, Joshua? A brigand is a fine, brave, terrible soldier, who is not afraid of anything! Not even afraid of insulting young ladies and shooting their faithful dogs. When armed to the teeth, he is the terror of little boys and baby girls. Come, Joshua!"

She arose, and keeping her hand on the dog's collar, recrossed the bridge, and walked leisurely along the woodland path.

Col. Anglesea left his perch on the railing, and, with a mocking smile, sauntered after her.

She turned upon him with flashing eyes.

"Keep your distance, sir! If you presume to come near me, as I live, I will go to my father as soon as I get home, and appeal to him for protection from you!" she said, still holding a firm grip upon the collar of Joshua, who was grimly showing his teeth and growling

"Full defiance, hate and scorn"

of the intruder on his mistress' company.

Now that Mr. Force should hear of Angus Anglesea's suit to his daughter from herself, and at this stage of the proceedings, was a misfortune that Col. Anglesea would most earnestly have deprecated. So he bowed with mock submission and replied:

"Pardon me, I will say no more. Your mother must be my advocate with you. I must send her to you to plead my cause."

And with another and a deeper bow he stepped to the side of the path and let the girl and her dog pass on before him.

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## CHAPTER VIII

### IN THE CRUCIBLE

He promptly kept his word. He struck into the woods, made a short detour, and came out again upon the path some yards in front of Odalite and her guardian. Walking rapidly, he arrived at home before her.

He went immediately in search of Mrs. Force, whom he found at her piano in the drawing room.

"I must have a few moments uninterrupted conversation with you. Where can I best secure it?"

"Here," she answered, wearily. "No one is likely to enter and disturb you."

"Very well, then. Here be it," he assented, walking down the room to a group of chairs near the open fire.

She arose and followed him.

As soon as they were seated he said:

"I have just left your daughter. I have made her an offer of my hand."

"Well?"

"She refused it."

"Just what you might have expected."

"Thank you."

"What next?"

"I am not a man to be repulsed. I pressed my suit with some earnest persistency."

"And then?"

"She threatened to appeal to her father for protection against me."

"Poor Odalite! Poor child!" murmured the unhappy mother.

"Poor idiot!" brutally exclaimed the man. "See here, madam, I shall insist upon this marriage. If she is permitted to appeal to her father at this point I shall be disappointed, but you will be lost. You must see the girl at once, before the return of her father this evening. You must induce her to accept me for her husband. She must be made to do so, or pretend to do so, willingly, joyfully. You know best what arguments to use with her. You must also persuade your husband to consent to the marriage, for the sake of his dear daughter's happiness, you understand."

"For the sake of his dear daughter's 'happiness'!" moaned Elfrida Force, in mournful irony.

"Yes. I repeat it. For the sake of her happiness. How, under existing circumstances, should her happiness be best preserved, do you think? By marrying that young naval officer, and seeing, as a consequence, the

ruin and dishonor of her whole family, and, bitterest of all, being made to feel the shame and regret of her own young husband for having married her, the daughter of——"

"Wretch! hold your tongue!" exclaimed Elfrida Force, clasping her head with both hands.

"Or," relentlessly continued the man, "would her happiness be best secured by marrying me, who, knowing the skeleton in the closet, accepts it with other family incumbrances, and keeps it closely locked up from the knowledge of all, since his honor is then also concerned in its concealment, and in the social rank and domestic peace of his new relations? Now, then, answer me. Which fate is to be preferred for your daughter?"

"Oh, demon! I think a marriage with you the worst possible fate that could befall my child. If she only were in question I would—oh, my Lord, how gladly!—lay her in her coffin rather than give her to you. But it is not of her that I am thinking most," moaned the lady, almost unconsciously, as she bowed her weary head upon her hand.

No, nor was it over the child, but over the husband she was mourning—the adored husband—the proud, sensitive, honorable man, whose head would be bowed to the dust with shame at any reproach, however undeserved, that might fall upon his wife.

Who cannot foresee the result of such a contest? Before the end of the interview the mother had consented to offer up her child, that the wife might save her husband.

Angus Anglesea left the room triumphant.

Elfrida Force crept up to her bedchamber, opened a little medicine chest, took from it a small vial containing a colorless liquid, poured out a few drops in a wineglass half full of water, and drank off the sedative.

This was not the first occasion on which the unhappy lady had felt herself obliged to resort to deadening drugs

to enable her to bear the presence of Angus Anglesea in the house.

Then she locked her medicine chest, and went down to the sitting room, and, calling a servant, said:

"Watch for Miss Odalite. She is out walking. As soon as she returns ask her to come immediately to me."

"Miss Odalite is comin', ma'am. I seen her just now a-comin' froo de souf gate," replied the negro boy.

"Then go and meet her, and ask her to come to me."

"Yes, ma'am," replied the boy, darting out to do his errand.

In a few moments Odalite came in, looking anxiously at her mother.

"You sent for me, mamma. You are not well. Have you a headache?" she inquired, tenderly.

"No, darling, a heartache, rather. Lay off your bonnet and coat, Odalite, and come here and sit beside me on this sofa."

Odalite obeyed, still full of vague forebodings.

"I hear, my love," said the lady, putting her arm around the girl's slight waist, as they sat together, "that a great honor has been offered you this morning."

Odalite looked up, uneasily.

"Do you understand me, darling?" the lady inquired, gently pressing the form of her child, and gazing fondly in her face.

"I—I—think I know what you allude to, mamma; but—I did not consider it an honor," faltered the girl, dropping her eyes.

"Col. Anglesea has offered you his hand. Is it not so?"

"Yes, mamma."

"Col. Anglesea is a gentleman of the highest social position. I congratulate you, my darling."

"But, mother! mother!" Odalite exclaimed in alarm. "I have declined Col. Anglesea's offer!"

"Have you, my dear? Then you acted very hastily

and inconsiderately. You will think better of it and accept it," said the lady, very gravely.

"Oh, no, no, mamma! Never! never! How could I think of doing such a thing, when I am on the very eve of marriage with Le?"

"My daughter, you were too hasty in that matter also. That childish engagement—which was no binding one, after all—need not and must not prevent your forming a more desirable union with Col. Anglesea," urged the lady, almost in the very words used by the colonel himself when pressing his suit with Odalite.

"Oh, mother! mother! surely you do not advocate—— Oh, mother! mother! Spare me! Do not urge me into such a dreadful act!" exclaimed the girl, starting up in a wild excitement.

"Sit down and calm yourself, my dear child, and listen to me."

Odalite threw herself on the sofa, and buried her face in its cushions.

"Col. Anglesea belongs to one of the noblest families in the north of England," continued the lady. "He is a neighbor and friend of my father. He can give you a high position among the landed gentry of England."

"But, oh, mother! dear mother! dear mother! I do not want a high position anywhere! and especially in a foreign country, where I should be separated from you and father and my little sisters!" sobbed the girl, with her face down in the cushions.

"But, my dear, you are very young, and you do not know what is good for you. I, your mother, so much older, so much more experienced, surely do know what is best for your happiness. And, Odalite, I have set my heart on your marriage with this gentleman. If you should persist in your rejection of his suit I should be more than disappointed; I should be deeply grieved; yes, grieved beyond measure, Odalite."

This, and much more to the same purpose, was

strongly and persistently urged by the mother, until Odalite, frightened, distressed and overwhelmed by her vehemence, earnestness and persistence, fell half conquered at the lady's feet, with the cry that opened this story:

"Mother! oh, mother! it will break my heart!"

Yet not for that would the lady yield. And not for that did she pause. But after more caressings, more persuasion, and more arguments—seeing that nothing less than the knowledge of the dread secret which had blighted her own bright youth could ever win Odalite to consent to the only sacrifice through which that secret would be kept—the mother, as has been already told, drew her daughter off to the seclusion of her own bedchamber, where they remained shut up for two hours.

At the end of that time Odalite came out alone, looking, oh! so changed, as if the bright and blooming girl of sixteen had suddenly become a sad and weary woman.

With her face pale and drawn, her forehead puckered into painful furrows, her eyes red and sunken, her lips shrunken down at the corners, her head bent, her form bowed, her steps feeble, she went like a woman walking in her sleep, straight down the stairs, down the hall and through the front door to the piazza, where she found Col. Anglesea walking slowly up and down the floor and smoking.

At her approach he threw away his cigar and turned to meet her, eager expectation on his face.

She went and stood before him, and said, with a strange, cold steadiness:

"Col. Anglesea, I have come to tell you that you may go to my father and ask his permission for you to marry me. You may also say to him, from me, that I hope he will give his consent, because—it will be a fiendish falsehood; but never mind that; you can tell it—because the marriage will secure my happiness."

## CHAPTER IX

### SUITOR AND FATHER

When Odalite had signified her acceptance of the suit of Anglesea, although she had expressed herself in not too flattering language, the gallant colonel would have assumed the rôle of a favored lover and advanced to embrace her; but she lifted both hands and turned away her head with a look of repulsion calculated to cool the ardor of the warmest suitor, as she cried, sternly:

"Stand back! Do not dare to lay a finger on me! I do not belong to you! I am not yet your property! You are not my owner! You have not received my father's permission to take possession of me! Go to him and tell him the falsehood you first suggested! Oh! how I hate you!"

And pale and cold and hard as she always was in his presence, with a loathing that was too deep for flush of cheek or flash of eye, she turned and re-entered the house.

He looked after her with a perfectly demoniacal expression of mingled longing and malignity, muttering:

"Oh, very well, my lady! It is your day now! But it will be mine soon! And then I shall know how to reduce you to submission."

He took another cigar from his pocket case, lighted it and recommenced his slow walk up and down the porch, smoking as before.

So far his plan had succeeded. The mother's consent to his marriage with the heiress had been wrung from her through her fears for her husband. The daughter's consent had been wheedled from her through her love for her mother. These certainly seemed the most important steps toward ultimate triumph. But yet there remained the father's consent to be obtained. And this,

which at first seemed of little moment, now grew into something of grave consideration.

To be sure, he could easily go to Mr. Force and tell him that he loved his daughter, and that he wished to marry her; also that he had been so fortunate as to win such an interest in her heart as to make this marriage a matter in which her life's happiness was concerned.

He could say all this and more, without troubling himself about its truthfulness; and so far, well.

But how should he justify himself to his host for having taken advantage of opportunity and abused hospitality by seeking the affections of the young daughter of his host, when he knew that her father cherished other matrimonial intentions for her, in which she also had perfectly coincided, until allured from her fidelity by the trusted guest of the house?

Ay! how should he explain all this to Mr. Force?

Not so very easily; but, then, Col. Anglesea was a very plausible person, and Mr. Force was one of the least suspicious among men.

Anglesea, walking up and down the porch, and puffing away at his cigar, resolved to put on an air of blunt, soldierly frankness; tell Mr. Force—what he chose to call—the state of the case, and leave the affair in her father's hands, to be dealt with as he should see fit—knowing full well what the event would be.

Now that the girl's consent to the marriage was secured, and her lips were sealed as to her own feelings on the subject, Col. Anglesea had no fears of the final result; nor was he in such special haste as to think it necessary to trouble Mr. Force with his suit on this same night, when the good gentleman should return, weary from his day's attendance at court.

Therefore he resolved to defer the important interview until the next morning, when his own method of procedure might also be more matured.

Mr. Force, in fact, came home rather late that eve-

ning. Tea had been kept waiting for him so long that it was nearly nine o'clock when the family assembled around the table.

There were Mr. and Mrs. Force, Col. Anglesea, Miss Meeke, Wynnette and Elva; but there was one absentee.

"Where is Odalite?" inquired her father, looking around the table.

"She has gone to bed with a nervous headache," replied her mother.

"Nothing serious, I hope," said the father, uneasily.

"Oh, no, nothing at all serious," answered the mother.

"I never knew Odalite to have a headache in her life before," said Mr. Force.

"No, but then—

" 'Such things must begin, some day,,' "

quoted the lady, with a forced smile.

Col. Anglesea engaged Mr. Force in conversation to draw off his attention from Mrs. Force, who seemed to have some difficulty in maintaining her self-possession.

After tea his host proposed a game of whist, and the party of four grown people sat down to a rubber.

Col. Anglesea and Mrs. Force played against Mr. Force and Miss Meeke.

The colonel and the hostess beat the rubber. And soon afterward the circle separated and retired to rest.

It was just after breakfast the next morning when Col. Anglesea said to his host:

"Force, can you give me a few moments private conversation before you go away this morning?"

"Certainly. Come in here," said the master of the house, leading the way to the vacant drawing room, and wondering much what Anglesea could possibly have to say to him in private.

"You will be very much surprised, and, I fear, very much displeased at what I am about to say to you; and

yet, Force, I must say it. No other course is open to me, as a man of honor!" began Col. Anglesea, when the key was turned in the door and both men were seated.

"Whatever can you have to say to me that requires such deep solemnity of introduction?" demanded Mr. Force, with a light laugh, and yet with some uneasiness.

"It is this, then. Do not be offended. But I cannot help it—I love your daughter!" said the colonel, with that affectation of bluntness he had determined upon.

Mr. Force, with hands on knees, bent forward and stared at the speaker.

"You—love—my—daughter!" he slowly repeated.

"Yes! I cannot help it. If it be a crime, I cannot help it! If I were to be shot for it, I could not help it!"

"But, man alive! she is only sixteen, and you must be near forty! Quite old enough to be her father!"

"Yes, quite! You are right, and that is the worst of it! And doubtless I am a fool! But there! I love her! I cannot help it, I say!"

"But, dear me, Anglesea, you know it is of no sort of use your loving Odalite. She is to marry her cousin, you know."

"Yes, I know."

"I am very sorry for this, Anglesea."

"If it were only myself that is concerned I pledge you my word of honor that I would go away at once and bear my disappointment like a man. But, oh! Force, it is not only myself. I am not the only one whose happiness is at stake in this matter," said the colonel, solemnly.

Mr. Force stared at him uneasily.

"You do not mean—you do not mean—— What do you mean, man?" he demanded at length.

"Let me be perfectly frank with you, Mr. Force. Nothing was further from my—from our—intention than that which has happened. We drifted into this. When I discovered that my heart was irrevocably given to your daughter, and remembered that you had other

views for her than my poor alliance, I was shocked and disgusted with myself, and I would have finished my long visit here, and would have gone away to distract my sorrow in extended travel; but when, too late, I also discovered that—well, it seems strange—but there is no accounting for such occurrences."

"In a word, what do you mean?" demanded Mr. Force, more and more disturbed.

"I mean that this attachment is reciprocal; that your lovely daughter returns my affection. Seeing that—as a man of honor, not to say a man in love—what could I do? I have made your daughter an offer of my hand, subject to your approval. She bids me say to you that her happiness is dependent on your consent to our marriage, and then to give the mater entirely in your hands, where I now place it, and leave it."

"Good heavens, Anglesea! this is a great shock to me! a very great shock!" exclaimed Mr. Force.

"I am sorry for it—very sorry. We place ourselves absolutely at your disposal, and submit ourselves to your will. We can do no more."

"How long has this been going on?"

"I think I must have begun to love your daughter from the first hour in which I saw her; but I think the growth of the interest was so gradual that I was not conscious of it until it was too late."

"When you put it to me as a hypothetical case, whether, if my daughter's happiness were involved in some other marriage, I would consent to forego my cherished plan of marrying her to her cousin, had you this case of yours and hers in view?"

"Not consciously. But we are such 'self-deceivers ever' that I may have had this at the bottom of my heart."

"My girl has been looking ill and out of spirits lately. Poor child!" said the father, reflectively. "Now, is her

loss of bloom and cheerfulness caused by this affair between you?"

"I will tell you as truly as I can what has been on her mind," said the colonel, with a show of the most perfect candor. "She is struggling between her sense of duty to you and her affection for me. She thinks she ought to marry the young midshipman because you have set your heart on her doing so; and yet she does not wish to marry any one except your unworthy servant here present. This terrible struggle has been too much for her. Yesterday I proposed that we should end it all by coming to you, making a full confession for both of us, and leaving our fate in your hands."

"It is a terrible shock! a terrible shock! Have you spoken to her mother?"

"Yes; but she very properly referred me to you."

There was a pause of some moments, during which Mr. Force arose from his seat and walked uneasily up and down the whole length of the drawing room several times. Finally he stopped before the colonel, and said:

"Anglesea, this has been so sudden—so utterly unexpected—that I feel bewildered by it all. I cannot trust myself to give you an answer this morning. I must have a talk with her mother—yes, and with herself. I must try and get at the bottom of this change of sentiment in my daughter. I must leave you now."

"I thank you, Force, for the indulgence with which you have heard me. I feel like a very villain to have come into your house, accepted your princely hospitality and used the opportunity and abused the trust so viciously as to have won the heart of your daughter, and to have disappointed all your cherished hopes of another alliance for her. All I can say is——"

"Say no more, my dear Anglesea. These things cannot be prevented. 'The demands of the heart are absolute.' The fault—the presumption—was mine, in daring to think that any human being could make a match

for another. In daring to try to make a match between my daughter and her cousin merely to gratify my ambition of sending the family name down to posterity with the family estate. There should be no 'parental' or other interference in such sacred matters. You and my daughter have become attached to each other. It is enough. I must speak to her mother, and, if need be, we must both bear our disappointment as we best can."

"But, my dear Force, if you feel this so deeply, there need be no final disappointment. Your fair daughter is very young. She may soon be able to forget me in the attractive society of some other and more favored suitor. As for me, I can go away; and though it is not likely that one of my age, loving for the first time in my life, will ever be able to forget my love, yet I hope I am man enough to bear my sorrow without complaint. Come, my kind host, the case is really at your disposal," said the colonel, with an air of frank generosity that would have deceived an angel.

"You are a noble fellow, Anglesea! A noble, open-minded fellow! I must consider my daughter. I must consider my daughter! And I have no doubt that this affair will end as you wish."

"You are really too good—too self-sacrificing! I, too, should consider your dear daughter's welfare above all other interests. But, see here, Force, in the event of my ever becoming the happy husband of your eldest child, what should there be to hinder me from taking the family name? I am the younger son of such a long line of younger sons that the marquisate must be at least a hundred removes from me, or I from the marquisate, whichever you like. So your cherished hope may yet be fulfilled in me."

"You are generous, Anglesea! I had not thought of such a concession from you. I should not have presumed to suggest it."

"What possible concession would I not make in order not only to win the daughter, but to satisfy the father?"

"Thank you, thank you, Anglesea! I will speak to you further on the subject when I have conferred with my wife. There is my horse," he said, glancing through the front window, "and I must be off now to meet my engagement. Good-morning."

And Mr. Force warmly shook the hand of his guest, and left the room.

He paused in the front hall for a few moments, and seemed to fumble a good deal with his overcoat, gloves and hat before he finally appeared on the outside equipped for his journey.

Then he hastily threw himself into his saddle, and rode off, attended by his mounted groom.

Col. Anglesea walked leisurely down to the stables, chose a horse to his mind, ordered him to be saddled and brought up to the house, and then he returned to prepare himself for a "constitutional" gallop along the high-road.

Mrs. Force confined herself to her own room that day.

Odalite walked out into the woods, and then down to the seashore, followed by her faithful companion, Joshua.

The two younger children remained shut up in the schoolroom with Miss Meeke, diligently preparing for their home examination, that was to earn for them, if satisfactorily passed, many Christmas premiums and a long Christmas holiday.

And so the bright and kindly winter day passed.

When Col. Anglesea came home to dinner he found only Miss Meeke and the two little girls in the dining room.

Miss Meeke apologized for the absence of the ladies, pleading that Mrs. Force was suffering from indisposition, and that Miss Force was attending her; and with this explanation the governess took the head of the table.

Col. Anglesea politely expressed his regret, and then made himself as agreeable as possible to the remaining party.

It was so very late when Mr. Force returned that, finding the family had already taken tea, he declined the refreshment offered by Miss Meeke, and pleading fatigue, excused himself and retired, expressing his satisfaction, however, that the trial which had occupied so much of his time was at length happily concluded.

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## CHAPTER X

### HUSBAND AND WIFE

Mr. Force was not obliged to ride to town the next day, for which he was thankful.

All the family met around the breakfast table in high spirits, with the exception of Mrs. Force and her daughter, Odalite, both of whom were pale and almost silent, trying to overcome their depression of spirits and to take a lively part in the conversation, but failing signally.

Col. Anglesea kept the ball rolling, however, by talking gayly to Miss Meeke, Wynnette and Elva, and sometimes gravely to Mr. Force or others.

Mr. Force watched his wife and daughter very anxiously, and drew his own conclusions from the false premises laid down by Col. Anglesea.

"My dear wife is troubled about Odalite, and Odalite is troubled about herself. They both think that I shall forbid the attentions of Anglesea, and insist on the claims of Leonidas Force. Strange that my dear ones should imagine that I, of all people, could forbid anything they wish, or insist on anything they dislike. I must set their dear hearts at ease without delay."

Immediately after breakfast, leaving the other members of the family to disperse and pursue their various avocations, he followed his wife into her sitting room, where he found her at her worktable, in her usual corner between the fireplace and the side window.

He closed the door, turned the key, and came and sat beside her.

She looked up in his face uneasily.

He took her hand gently within his own and said:

"Elfrida, dear, why can't you trust me? Why have you troubled yourself for days with a question that should have been settled satisfactorily on its first arising? Tell me."

She started slightly, and looked at him intently.

Had he discovered anything? Did he suspect anything?

But no! The honest black eyes fixed on hers had no expression but perfect love and faith.

"Why didn't you tell me, wife, that Odalite had given her heart to Anglesea? Did you think that I was so selfish as to sacrifice my own child—your child—to my private ambition? No, Elfrida! No, dear! Never think so hardly of me."

She could not reply. She burst into tears, covered her face with her hands, and sobbed convulsively.

"Don't! Don't, Elfrida! You distress yourself with thinking that I am disappointed in my plans for our dear girl. But I am not, really. It came upon me quite suddenly, you see, and I was not prepared for the thought of such a change. And so, you see, just at first, perhaps, I might have expressed more feeling of disappointment at the time than the matter justified. And—— Well, I suppose Anglesea has told you, and you distress yourself on my account."

"Anglesea has told me nothing that passed in his interview with you, dear Abel. Indeed, we have not exchanged a word on the subject since he spoke to you of

it," said Mrs. Force, trying to suppress her sobs and calm her emotion.

"Then why should you grieve so, dear? I am really not so much disappointed, after all; for, indeed, Anglesea behaved in such a frank, noble, generous manner, confessing the whole case to me, telling me how they—himself and Odalite—drifted into this attachment unawares, until it was too late to recede; and how, when he perceived that he loved her with all his heart and soul, he would have gone away rather than have sought to win her from the youth her parents had chosen for her husband; but how, when he discovered that his love was returned by her, he felt himself bound as a man of honor to declare his affection and offer her his hand, subject to her father's approval."

"He—told you this?" demanded the lady, in a husky tone, turning away her head to conceal the look of scorn and hatred she could not entirely suppress.

"Yes, dear! he told me this; and then—he left the case in my hands with perfect submission. Could any action have been more manly and straightforward? And she, too—Heaven bless her, she, too! She sent me word, through him, that though her heart was fixed on Angus Anglesea, yet she submitted herself entirely to my will, and would obey my commands. Did ever father have such a daughter, so gentle, so dutiful, so obedient as Odalite? Or did ever girl have such a lover, so noble, generous and magnanimous as Anglesea? Why—fine fellow—he felt for my disappointment as if it had been his own; and he exaggerated it, as I have told you! And he offered—dear fellow—to merge his own name in ours, so that my cherished wish to send the patronymic down with the estate might be carried out."

"But that will not be necessary," said the lady, recovering from her emotion, and with a grim smile arising out of her own thoughts.

"How, not necessary, my dear?"

"In this way: Leonidas Force, who is but twenty-one, can afford to wait two years and marry Wynnette, who will then be of marriageable age. They can live at Greenbushes, and in due course of time they can succeed us here at Mondreer."

"But Mondreer is the heritage of our eldest daughter."

"Not necessarily; not by entail, only by tradition and custom. You can leave your estate to whom you please; though, of course, you need not think of leaving it to any one; for you may hold it yourself for fifty years to come. You are not forty, and you may live to be ninety. But when you do leave it, it would be better to leave it to Wynnette."

"And—Odalite?"

"You lose sight of one matter, dear Abel—the future possibilities of our eldest daughter."

"I—do not quite understand. Anglesea, I know, has no very great expectations from any quarter, and so if he should marry Odalite they may need Mondreer; and Anglesea has promised to take the family name that it may go down with the estate."

"I think I can show you that the estate of Mondreer can be secured to the Forces by the marriage of Leonidas Force with our second daughter, much better than it ever could be by the marriage of any one, whether Leonidas Force, Angus Anglesea, or another, with our eldest daughter."

"I wish you would tell me, then, dear, for I am in a maze."

"Have you forgotten that the Earldom of Enderby, failing male heirs, descends to the female line? 'falls to the distaff,' as old writers call it?"

"No, I have not forgotten it, for I never knew it," replied honest Abel, lifting his eyebrows.

"Know it now, then! I have never spoken of this matter to you before; because, indeed, I have seldom

thought of it at all, and nothing has occurred until now to recall it to my mind; but it is a fact of too serious importance to be overlooked at this crisis. Reflect now, that there is only one frail life between me and the heirship of my father's earldom—the life of my epileptic half-brother Francis, who, inheriting the malady of his beautiful young mother who perished in her youth, has declared that he will never marry to perpetuate such a misfortune."

"We will not, dear, speculate on the possible early death of your brother," said Abel Force, gravely and tenderly, but without the slightest shade of rebuke in his tones.

"No, we will not speculate; but we cannot avoid thinking of the possible, and, indeed, the very probable future of our eldest daughter, and guide ourselves accordingly," replied the lady.

"In what way?" gently inquired her husband.

"In this way, then: We must admit that it is not at all unlikely that our eldest daughter may live to inherit her grandfather's earldom and become Countess of Enderby in her own right. In which case, should she be living here, the wife of an American citizen, she must either lose all the privileges of her rank and title or else go to England and reside upon her estates there, leaving this place in the hands of strangers. I do not say that she would be legally obliged to take this alternative, but she would be conventionally and practically constrained to do so. Whereas, if she should marry an English gentleman, all would be well with her; she would then in any case make her home in England, and when she should inherit the Earldom of Enderby she could enter upon her new dignities without any disturbance of her domestic or social life. And if, in addition to this, Le should wed Wynnette, all would be well with them and with Mondreer; the old estate would remain in the old name. Don't you see?"

"Yes, I see. It is all for the best, of course. All for the best. So I shall tell my little girl. I long to tell her, face to face, how well satisfied I am, and should be in any event, that she should please herself. I want to tell her how well I think of her choice—how nobly I think he has acted, and—many things that will bring back the roses to her cheeks and the laughter to her lips. But I will not tell her of her future brilliant possibilities in England, and I hope that you have not done so."

"No, never!"

"Quite right. I would have her build her hopes of happiness on better foundations. Where can I find her?"

"She is in her own room; but I would not talk to her to-day. She is so shaken. Her little, tender heart is so pained—now that she has decided to please herself—to think of the suffering she may cause Le."

"Oh, that is what is the matter with her, is it? Well, tell her Le must console himself with Wynnette! Oh, it will all come right! I am quite confident that it will all come right!" happily concluded the honest squire, rising to leave the room.

He stooped and kissed his wife and then went out whistling an old hunting tune.

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## CHAPTER XI

### FATHER AND DAUGHTER

He went to the stables, mounted his cob and ambled all over his plantation, looking after such work as could only go on at this season of the year—mending of fences, repair of outbuildings, of agricultural implements, and so forth.

Then he came back to the house and hung about it in hope of meeting his daughter.

At length, about noon, he saw her out on the lawn, warmly clothed in her close-fitting brown cloth coat, and her quaint brown beaver poke bonnet tied down tightly as if for a walk in the wind on this bright, breezy December day.

He quickly slipped on his overcoat, snatched his hat and gloves, and hurried after her.

He overtook her just as she reached the east gate opening upon the path that led down to the shore.

"'Where are you going, my pretty maid?
Where are you going, my pretty maid?'"

he sang, gayly, as he came up with her.

She started, looked around and recognized her father.

"I am going down to the shore, papa," she answered, as prosaically as if he had not sung his question. But he was not put down.

"'May I go with you, my pretty maid?
May I go with you, my pretty maid?'"

he continued, taking her hand and drawing it through his arm.

But she was not be won to any frivolity, so she replied, gravely:

"I should be very glad to have you, papa."

"'Why so pale and wan, fond lover?
Why so pale and wan?'"

he continued, in a tone of mock gravity.

"What is the matter with you to-day, papa, dear?" she inquired, uneasily regarding him.

"Why do you ask? Because I quote old poetry? My

dear, it is to convince you that I am in excellent humor with all the world, and that you have no cause to complain of me. I do not intend to enact the rôle of a 'cruel parent,' in order to make you a persecuted heroine. I do not even intend to reproach you with your inconstancy!—though I do hope it is not going to be a chronic complaint!—because it would be embarrassing, for instance, if while we were in the midst of the preparations for your wedding with Anglesea, young Herriott, the new minister, were to come and beg my indulgence to explain to me how you never really cared for the colonel, but found your salvation depend on your union with him—Herriott! And by the time we have adapted ourselves to the new situation, young Dr. Ingle should solicit a private interview and inform me that you——"

"Oh, papa! don't! don't!" exclaimed the girl, almost surprised into a smile.

"Well, I will 'don't,' until we get down this hill, which is rather rugged!" said Mr. Force, as he passed his daughter, and went before her down the declivity, clearing away the branches of tall bushes that crowded and obstructed the narrow path.

When they reached the foot of the hill he once more gave her his arm, and they walked along the sands toward the north—Mr. Force purposely taking that direction, because it was the opposite one from that which led toward Greenbushes.

"Now, my darling," he continued, "laying all jokes aside, I wished to talk to you to-day, to assure you that you need not distress yourself, either about my fancied disappointment or about Le's fancied despair, when he shall hear of your change of mind."

"Papa——"

"Hear me out, my darling! Hi! look at that rise of blue necks! If Anglesea were only here with his gun and dogs! He is a famous shot, my dear! Where was I? Oh! I say, as for myself, I am quite satisfied to receive

Anglesea as my son-in-law. He is of noble race—there is a marquisate in the family, though too far removed to do him much good, except in the honor of the connection. He is of moderate fortune, very moderate; but wealth should not be the first consideration, you know! He is a fine, noble, generous, chivalrous fellow, and I like and admire him. And more than this—more than all else, he is my dear daughter's choice, and as such I shall welcome him into the family circle."

"Oh, papa, papa!" moaned Odalite, pierced through the heart by the thought of how little her father knew of the real character of the man, the real circumstances of the case, and how impossible it was for her to enlighten him.

"Still so grave, my little one? It is of Leonidas you are thinking! Do not fret your tender heart about him, my darling girl! If you, after three years separation from your boyish lover, have changed toward him—of which, in your secluded home, there was about one chance in a hundred of your doing—be sure that he, in his long absence from his childish sweetheart, on his long cruise around the world, has half forgotten the baby girl he left behind—as there must have been a hundred chances to one that he would. I think he will in time be able to console himself with your sister. It is all in the family, you know!" he said, looking down quizzically at the young face by his side.

But, somehow, the expression of that face did not convey the idea of any great satisfaction. Quite the contrary. Odalite looked ready to cry.

"I do believe girls, with their lovers, are like dogs in the manger; they can't marry them all, and yet they are not willing that any other girl should have any of the rejected ones! Sweet angel!—the girl of the nineteenth century!"

"I do not think," murmured Odalite, breaking in upon her father's silent criticism—"I do not think, judging

from Le's letters, that he has ever changed toward me. No, papa, I do not wish to justify myself by accusing Le."

"Le's letters, my dear! Why, they afford the strongest proofs to my mind that he is not, and never has been, the least bit in love with you."

Odalite looked up in surprise.

"My dear, you have no experience, or you would never mistake Le's practical epistles for love letters. Why, you let all the family read them! You could not if they were love letters."

"Why, papa?"

"Because, my dear, if they were, they would be much too silly to be shown. You would not think so; but you would have sense enough left to know that other people would; and so you would hide them. But Le's letters are laudably practical and fit to be shown to a deacon, as, for instance, this:

" 'Tell Beever he can stay on as overseer as long as you please; so he must look out and please you. Tell him I don't know anything about the relative merits of Durham or Alderney breeds of cattle, or Southdown sheep, or anything of that sort. I took my degree at a naval academy, not at an agricultural college. So you just buy what stock you like best, and if you don't know any better than I do, ask your father. He does.'

"That's the sort of love letters Le writes to you, my dear! A letter that he might have written to his attorney or to his overseer!"

"And yet, showing in every line, in every word, his constant consideration for me, his wish to defer everything to me," sighed Odalite.

"Showing the carelessness of the sailor, rather than the devotion of the lover! But look you here, my little girl! How is this? Grieving—actually grieving for Le, while you are loving and engaging to marry Anglesea? I do not understand it!"

"Oh, papa! It is only that I wish to be just to Le! And I wish you to be just to him. However you may blame my fickleness, do not blame him; he has not changed!"

"Tut, tut, my dear! Young naval officers sailing all over the world, seeing all sorts of beautiful and attractive women of all races and nations, do not break their hearts about little, childish sweethearts left in their country homes, and whom they have not seen for years! Midshipman Leonidas Force, if he aspires to marry one of my daughters, must put up with the second Miss Force! Ay, and must wait until she is of suitable age! Now let us talk about the wedding! The colonel—he is something like a lover!—wants it to come off as soon as may be, before Christmas, if possible! What do you say, my dear?" inquired the squire, just to divert his daughter's mind from what he considered a morbid and painful compassion for the discarded lover's wrongs.

"It shall be just as my mother pleases, sir! I should like to leave everything to her," replied Odalite.

"That is quite right. The mother is the proper one, of course. Well, talk to her, my precious, and whatever arrangements you two agree upon I shall indorse. It seems to be clouding up. I should not wonder if we were to have snow before night. Shall we turn homeward?"

"Yes, if you please, papa."

"Oh! look at those wild turkeys! What a splendid chance for a shot, if I only had my fowling piece. Strange that I only have such chances when I have no gun—and consequently no chance at all!" laughed the squire, as they turned to go up the hill.

They reached the house just as the first fine flakes of snow began to fall.

"It will be a white Christmas, with fine sleighing, after all, perhaps," said the squire, cheerily, as they entered the house.

"Dinner has been waiting full half an hour, papa. And I would like to know where you and Odalite have been gadding to without saying a word to anybody. And I would like also to know—oh! how I should like to know—what has come to everybody in the house, that nobody but Elva and I and Miss Meeke have any common sense left!" exclaimed Wynnette, meeting the returning couple.

"Whereas the simple and exact truth is, that you three are the real and only lunatics in the house, and, like all lunatics, think everybody else but yourselves mad," laughed the squire, as he led his eldest daughter straight to the dining room.

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## CHAPTER XII

### ODALITE AND LEONIDAS

Before the week was ended Wynnette, as well as every other member of the family, knew "what was the matter."

Beever, the overseer of Greenbushes, came to consult Miss Force about the size and quality of the Persian rugs to be bought for the bedrooms of the farmhouse.

And Mr. Force, in the presence of the whole family, said that henceforth all these consultations were to be suspended, as Miss Force had nothing further to do with the fitting up of the house.

This caused much surprise, not only to the overseer, but to Wynnette and Elva, who became importunate in their inquiries, and in a manner compelled an explanation.

Great was the indignation of those two young ladies on learning that their dear Le was to be "thrown over" for the sake of that "big, yellow dog," Col. Anglesea.

Wynnette and Elva went off to take secret counsel together.

Wynnette declared that she meant to talk to Odalite about it, and also to Col. Anglesea, and to tell him, if need were, that he was no gentleman to come into the house to cut out—

"No, I won't say 'cut out,' either, for it is vulgar; I will say supplant—that is the word, and I will say something better than I first thought of, too! I will stand straight up before him and lift up my head and look him straight in the face, and I will say to him:

" 'Col. Angus Anglesea, do you consider it conduct becoming an officer and a gentleman to come into this house to supplant a gallant young midshipman, who is serving his country, in the affections of his betrothed bride?' "

"Oh! that will be splendid, Wynnette! What book did you get it out of?" innocently inquired Elva.

" 'Book?' No book! Every good thing I say you think comes out of a book; but it came out of my own head."

"What a splendid head you have, Wynnette!"

"Yes. I guess people will find that out some of these days."

"Col. Anglesea will, won't he? Now you say that to him, Wynnette! Just as you said it to me!"

"That will fetch him! No, not 'fetch him'—that is vulgar, too. Make an impression on him—that is what I mean, Elva."

"Yes; and I do just think that he would feel so ashamed of himself that he would turn right around and go home!"

"I hope he may!" said Wynnette.

"But if he should stay and marry Odalite, in spite of all, oh! what will poor Le do?" said compassionate little Elva.

"Don't know, I'm sure; but I know what I would do."

"What would you do, Wynnette?"

"Have the satisfaction of a gentleman."

"And what is that?"

"Call the rapscallion—no, I mean the diabolical villain—out and shoot him!"

"Oh, Wynnette! Is that the satisfaction of a gentleman? To commit so great a sin?"

"I'd do it, and face the music afterward. No—I mean I would take the consequences."

"Oh, no, you wouldn't, Wynnette. And you must not, for all the world, put such a thing in poor Le's head. He will be in trouble enough when he comes home, poor fellow, to find his sweetheart taken away from him without having—oh! I can't speak the dreadful word, Wynnette. Poor Le! I tell you what I'll do, Wynnette."

"What?"

"Well, if the worst comes to the worst, and that colonel does take Odalite away from Le——"

"Of course he will take Odalite away from Le. There is not a doubt of it. I shall have the pleasure of speaking my mind to the scalawag—I mean the wretch—but that is all I shall get; and he, he will feel ashamed of himself, perhaps, and that is all he will do. He is not a man to give up anything he wants; and he wants Odalite, and he means to have her—the brute!"

"Well, if it comes to that, I tell you what I will do. I will marry poor dear Le myself—that is, when I am big enough. I always did like Le."

"You! You marry Le!" exclaimed Wynnette, opening her black eyes to their widest capacity.

"Yes, when I am big enough—that is, I mean, unless you would take him. That would be ever so much better."

"I! Why, I wouldn't have Le Force if every hair on his head was hung with a diamond as big as a hazel

nut, and he would give them all to me. No, I thank you."

"Well, then, I would. So there now! Not only if he hadn't a diamond to his name, but if he hadn't a hair on his head. Poor Le! Poor dear Le! I do love him so dearly!"

Wynnette had made no vain boast of "bearding the lion." She watched her opportunity, and on the very first occasion on which she found him alone, sitting and reading in the drawing room, she—to use her own expression—"went for him."

She stood right up before the great soldier of India, and astonished him by addressing him in the very words she had rehearsed to Elva.

Col. Anglesea threw himself back in his chair, and gave way to a peal of laughter. And when he recovered his breath, patted her on the head and said, mockingly:

"You will forgive me, and thank Odalite, when you discover that we have got married on purpose to leave the gallant young middy to you, so that you shall not be an old maid."

"Thank you, sir. No one shall make a match for me. And since my peaceful mission to you has failed, I must leave you to be taken in hand by the gentleman you have robbed. He will call you to a strict account."

So saying, the small young lady threw up her head, and with great dignity marched out of the room.

Her next effort in the absent lover's cause was with Odalite herself.

She found her eldest sister in their mother's room, where a colored maidservant was engaged in unpacking a case just arrived from New York, and carefully extricating from its interior a rich white dress of velvet and swansdown, garnished with orange blossoms, and which was elaborately folded, with white tissue paper between every surface.

"Be careful, Net. The veil must be somewhere there,"

said Mrs. Force, who was standing over the case, watching the work.

"I reckon it is in this square bandbox at the bottom," suggested the woman.

"Get it up very carefully, then."

Odalite, sitting back in an easy chair, seemed languid and indifferent to what was going on before her.

"Is that the wedding dress?" inquired Wynnette, when the elegant structure was laid out at length upon the bed, the train hanging from the foot far down on the carpet.

"Yes, that is the wedding dress. What do you think of it? Is it not beautiful?" inquired Mrs. Force, gazing admiringly on the bridal robes.

"No! I think it is horrid! Perfectly horrid! I wouldn't wear it if I were Odalite!" exclaimed Wynnette, turning her back on the finery, and going straight up to where her sister sat alone in her sadness.

Disregarding the presence of others in the room, the impetuous little lady struck at once into the middle of her subject.

"Odalite! It is not true—it cannot be true—that you are going to throw over your own dear true love—our own darling Le, whom we have known all our lives—just to marry that foreign beat, whom nobody knows anything about—I mean that British colonel, who is almost a stranger to us?"

Wynnette was terrified at the result of her question.

Odalite bent forward, threw her arms around her sister's neck, and burst into a storm of sobs and tears.

Mrs. Force wisely forbore to interfere.

The colored woman looked on philosophically. She had seen hysterical brides before now.

Wynnette clasped her sister close to her bosom, and cried for company.

Presently Odalite raised her head, wiped the traces of tears from her face, and taking the hands of her sister,

looked earnestly up to her, and speaking more solemnly that she had ever done before, said:

Wynnette clasped her sister close to her bosom, and father and mother have consented that I may. Wynnette, if you love me, never, never speak to me of this again."

The little girl kissed her sister in perfect silence, saying to herself:

"He has bewitched her—there's where it is! He must have learned magic when he was in India, and he has bewitched her!"

A joyful commotion in the hall below, a chorus of voices in glad surprise, and of dogs in eager welcoming barks, attracted the instant attention of all who were present in the room.

"Oh, mother! what is it? What is it? Has—has—— Oh, mother!" exclaimed Odalite, half rising, then sinking back and grasping the arm of her chair, pale as death.

But before Mrs. Force could go to her daughter, the door was unceremoniously burst open by an excited negro girl, who, with her eyes starting, and her hair bristling, not with horror, but with delight, burst into the room, exclaiming:

"Marse Le is come home! Marse Le is come home! 'Deed he is, missus! 'Deed he is, Miss Odalite!"

And in another instant the young sailor rushed into the room with a joyous bound, almost whooping:

"Here I am, auntie! Here I am, cousins! Ship reached New York yesterday morning, and here I am to-day! And old Joshua knew me! Indeed he did, after three years. Where is she? Where is she! Where is my pet?" he asked eagerly, after hastily kissing and hugging everybody who had put themselves in the way between him and the fainting girl, and looking eagerly all around for her, he caught sight of her reclining in her easy chair.

He made an impetuous dash forward, caught her in

his arms, strained her to his heart, and covered her face with kisses, before he perceived her condition.

Then he lifted the lifeless form, hurried with it across the room and laid it on the bed, crushing the orange blossoms on the beautiful bridal dress, in careless disregard of everything but his sweetheart, and crying out in dismay:

"Oh, auntie! she has fainted! I took her too suddenly by surprise! And oh! my darling has fainted for joy!"

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## CHAPTER XIII

### LEONIDAS AND ODALITE

"Dear Leonidas, leave her to me. You know your room, dear boy! Go to it and call for whatever you want. Jake will wait on you as before you went away," said Mrs. Force, gently putting the young officer aside and taking his place next her daughter.

"But Odalite? I—I feel so worried about Odalite!" urged Le.

"Oh, she will rally soon! But you see, dear, we must remove her tight clothing, and you must leave the room."

"Oh, I see," assented the youth, and he went out.

Wynnette and Elva were waiting for him in the upper hall. They had held council together and decided not to tell him anything about Col. Anglesea's and Odalite's engagement.

"For," said canny Wynnette, "perhaps now that Le has come back Odalite may return to her first love."

And Elva agreed with her.

Now as soon as Le appeared in the hall the two children fell upon him with the most extravagant welcomes

and caresses, and, refusing to be shaken off, went up with him to his room.

In the meanwhile, in her bedchamber, Mrs. Force was doing all that she could to restore her daughter.

In a little while Odalite opened her eyes and fixed them full of unutterable anguish and reproach upon her mother's bending face.

She did not mean to do so. It was the first involuntary expression of her waking consciousness.

"Oh, do not look at me so, my child! You will break my heart!" moaned Elfrida Force.

Odalite took her mother's hand and kissed it tenderly; then closed her eyes and turned away her head.

Presently she said:

"Let no one tell him, mother, until I see him again. I must be the one to tell him."

"Oh, Odalite! Oh, my child! Would you—would you——" began the lady, in alarm; but her daughter hastened to allay her fears.

"No, mother, I would not! But send every one from the room so that we may talk together," she whispered.

Mrs. Force gave the order, and Luce, the colored woman, dropped a bridesmaid's dress that she was unpacking, and went out, followed by all the others, leaving the mother and daughter alone together.

"No, mother, dear, your secret is as safe with me as with the dead; for I seem dead. I must tell Le myself that I wish to break with him to marry Col. Anglesea; and that is true so far as it goes, because I do wish to marry him to save you and my dear father and my little sisters from evils much greater than my marriage with Col. Anglesea could bring me. I need not tell Le why, but simply that I do. Le will believe that I am false to him. And that will be true also, for I am false to him, no matter what my excuse may be! And it will be best for him to believe it; for it will help him to get over any disappointment he may feel now, or any re-

maining affection for me. That is the reason why I myself must be the one to tell him."

"Oh, Odalite! Oh, my dear! Can you do so?"

"Yes, I can compel myself to do so. And now, mother, I must get up and see Le, without delay. No! do not try to prevent me! I am strong enough in mind and body! I was only overcome for the moment by the sudden coming of Le so full of hope and joy, and the knowing what a shock of disappointment was in store for him. That was all. I am stronger now."

So saying, the girl arose from the bed, stood up and took hold of her long, black hair, which had fallen down. She walked to the dressing bureau and secured the roll with pins, and then proceeded to smooth the folds of her disordered dress.

When all this was done she left the room.

"Odalite! Odalite! where are you going, my child?"

"To my interview with Le! Don't hinder me, mother, dear! I can go through the ordeal now! I am nerved for it. I may not be able to meet the trial on another day, or even in another hour," said the girl, looking back for a minute, and then closing the door and passing downstairs.

Mrs. Force threw herself back in her easy chair, covered her face with both hands, and moaned.

Meanwhile Odalite went downstairs, opened the front door, and passed out upon the porch, on which the winter sun was shining, and through which a fresh breeze was blowing.

She was immediately followed by Luce, who had seen her leave the hall, and who now came out, bearing the girl's coat and bonnet on her arm, and saying:

"Yer want to ketch yer deff, doan yer, Miss Odylit? Goin' out in de cole widout nuffin on yer! Yer musn' gib yerse'f dat habit. 'Deed yer musn'. Here, put on yer coat an' bonnet."

The girl turned, and let the woman help her on with her outer garments, and when they were fastened, said:

"Aunt Lucy, will you go up to Mr. Le's room, and ask him to come down and join me here?"

"Yes, honey, sure I will. Didn' he put a s'prise on to us all? Whip you horses! how we was all took aback! Lor'! no wonder you fainted dead away. But look yere, chile. Dat was de fus time as yer ebber fainted in yer life, an' let it be de las'. Doan gib yerse'f a habit ob it. I know it tuk yer onawares dis time, bein' de fus time, an' you knowin' nuffin 'bout it. But you be on de watch out nudder time, an' if yer feel it a-comin' on, you 'sist it wid all yer might. Doan yer faint no mo'. Ef yer gibs yerse'f de habit, yer'll jes be like one ob dese yere po', mis'able, faintyfied creetures as can't stand nuffin. Dey's allus faintn'. It's a habit dey gibs deirselves."

So talking, Luce went into the house and up the stairs to give her message.

In a few moments Le came bounding down the steps, three or four at a bound, and out of the door with a shout of joy, to join his sweetheart, little thinking of what he was to meet.

"Luce tells me that you are all right now!" he exclaimed, suddenly clasping her in his arms and pressing her to his bosom, while he covered her face with kisses.

"Little mistress of Greenbushes! Little lady of the manor! Have they done everything to please you over there? If they have not—if any man has failed to please my little lady—that man must march. How soon will oud wedding be? Before Christmas? Let it be before Christmas. Let us keep our Christmas at Greenbushes, and have uncle and aunt and all the family there to keep it with us. Won't that be jolly? For you and me to entertain our friends at our own home! I was thinking of all this, and a lot more, all the homeward voyage. Odalite, why don't you answer me? Why, Odalite! Odalite! What is the matter?" he anxiously inquired,

seeing at length how pale and cold and silent she was—how utterly irresponsive to his enthusiasm.

She struggled out of his embrace, and stood leaning for support against the railings of the porch.

He followed her in surprise and alarm.

"Odalite! what is the matter, dear? Are you—are you going to be ill?"

"No!" she answered, in a hollow, far-off sounding voice. "No! But come with me—somewhere—where I can—breathe! Come down to the shore, Le. I have something to tell you."

He stepped back into the hall, hastily drew on his overcoat, seized his hat and gloves, and rejoined her, still in some anxiety, but without the least suspicion of the blow that was about to fall upon him.

He drew her arm within his own, and holding and fondling her hand, led her down the steps, across the lawn to the east gate, and down the wooded hill to the shore.

"No; I do not wish to walk further. We will rest here," she said, as soon as they had reached the sands. And she sank wearily upon the rude wooden bench that stood on the beach just above the water mark.

He sat down beside her, took her hand, looked into her pale face, and tenderly questioned:

"What has happened to distress you, darling? Is anyone you care for sick or in trouble? Can I help you, then? You know I would aid to my last dollar if it were any one you cared for," he said, caressing the little fingers he toyed with.

"Oh, Le! Le!" she moaned.

"Odalite!" he whispered, in an access of anxiety, "is any one—dead? Tell me! I have just come, and know nothing. Is any one—dead?"

"Oh, no! No, Le! No one is dead. I—I wish to Heaven some one were!"

"Odalite!"

"Not any one we love, Le. Oh, Le! I will tell you as soon as I can. Something has happened. I—I brought you out here to tell you. But, oh, Le! Le! dear Le! how shall I tell you?"

"My darling Odalite, what?"

"Don't speak to me, Le! Don't speak! Listen! Le, hate me! scorn me! I deserve that you should. Oh, no! no! Don't! don't! I should go mad if you did. But—try not to mind me; try not to care for me at all. I am not worth it, Le. Not worth a regret—not worth a thought. I am such a poor thing! Such a very poor thing! And I shall not last long. That is the best of it." She breathed these last words out in a low, long-drawn sigh, dropping her head upon her bosom and her arms upon her lap.

"Oh, my dear Odalite, what is the meaning of all this? What ails you? What misfortune has happened to you? Have you lost your health? Oh, my own, own darling! is it so? You are so pale and cold and faint! That must be it. You have lost your health. But do you think I would give you up for that? Oh, no, no, no, my precious! That would make me only more your own devoted Le than ever before. I would care for you, and wait on you, and nurse you more tenderly than ever a mother did her baby. For are you not my own—my very own?" he said, putting his arms around her and drawing her close to his heart.

"Oh, Le, Le! No, no, no! I am no longer your own! No longer your Odalite," she exclaimed, struggling out of his embrace, and bursting into a tempest of tears and sobs.

"Not my Odalite! Nonsense, dearest dear! Not my own Odalite? Whose else should you be, I wonder? Why, you have been my own Odalite all your little life. What can be the matter with you? I know now! I have read and heard about hysterics in young girls, and that is what has come over you, darling! I took you

too much by surprise! You fainted, and now you are hysterical! What can I do for you, Odalite? I wish I knew just what to do! Do you know? No! you shake your head. Well! let us go back to the house! We had certainly beter do that!" said the youth, rising and offering his arm.

"No! no, Le! not to the house! It is here that I must tell you! here by the sea! Yes! it is a fitting place for such a confession! here by the treacherous sea!" she said, trying to suppress the sobs that still shook her bosom.

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## CHAPTER XIV

### TOLD BY THE WINTRY SEA

The young man said no more, but simply stood before her and waited in wonder for her words.

"I am not hysterical, Le! I am not hysterical; but I am false—faithless! Despise and forget me, Le! for I am not worthy of your remembrance. I am false and faithless!"

"No, no! Odalite, it cannot be true!" cried the young man, in a sharp tone of anguish.

"Yes, yes! it is true! it is true! it is shameful, but it is true!" exclaimed the desperate girl.

"Oh, my Lord, my Lord! Can this be possible? You false to me, Odalite! You—you!" cried the youth, growing deathly pale, while great drops of cold sweat started from his forehead.

The girl strove to speak, but failed, and nodded with a choking sob.

"Who is the man?" demanded the youth, throwing himself again on the bench, since indeed he was scarcely able to stand.

"I—I—I—am engaged to Col. Anglesea," gasped and faltered Odalite.

"'Col. Anglesea!' And who, in the foul fiend's name, is Col. Anglesea? Satan fly away with him!"

"He is—is an—an officer in the—the East India Service."

"How did you come to know him? May the——"

"Oh, don't, don't, Le! He was an old—old friend of my mother, and—we met him at Niagara."

"I wish to Heaven he was at the foot of the falls!"

"So do I with all my heart!—oh, no, I don't either!—I—I don't know what I am talking about! My head is wild!" said Odalite, putting her hand to her forehead.

Le looked at her wistfully.

"An old friend of your mother, eh?"

"Yes."

"Rich? Of high rank?"

"I—I believe so."

"Where is the man?"

"He is here at Mondreer, where he has been staying ever since he came down with us at my father's invitation from Niagara."

"And you are going to marry him?"

"Oh, yes," replied Odalite, with a heartrending sigh. "It cannot be helped. It is all settled."

"I see how it is! A friend of your mother, rich, and of high position; and so they have yielded to the temptation of wealth and rank, and they have forced or coaxed you into compliance with their wishes in consenting to this dishonorable marriage! I did not think so of my uncle and aunt. But this cannot, shall not go on! I shall insist upon my prior rights. Take heart, my precious. I shall not let them destroy our happiness by parting us. No, not for all the wealth and rank in the world!"

"Oh, Le! Le! you mistake! you mistake! Nobody forced me! Nobody persuaded me! I am going to

marry Col. Anglesea of my own free will! Indeed I am! Oh, Le! Le!" wailed the unhappy girl.

The youth stared at her in speechless astonishment and bitter misery.

"Oh! don't look so, Le!—don't look so! I am not worth it, Le! Indeed I am not!"

"Do I understand you to say that you break your engagement to me, and marry this foreigner, of your own free, unbiased will?" he asked, at last, in cold, hard, restrained tones.

"Yes, yes, yes! that is what I am going to do!" replied Odalite, with the firmness of despair.

"Then you are false to me—to me, your lover, who had never a thought that was false to you!—to me, your mate of many years!—to me, your almost husband!" cried the youth, losing all self-command in the sharpness of his pain, and bursting into a tempest of grief and rage, and launching fierce reproaches upon her.

She raised her hands in piteous deprecation, and then held them up before her head as if to shield it from the storm.

But as he flashed the lightnings of scorn and hurled the thunder of condemnation upon her, she cowered lower and lower, holding by the bench on which she sat, until at length, utterly overwhelmed, she sank to the ground, rolled over, and lay with her face downward on the sand at his feet.

But she uttered no word in self-defense; she only wept and sobbed as if her heart were bursting.

By this time the frenzy of passion had spent itself, and there came a reaction that brought him to his senses. He looked down at Odalite in her misery. He saw in her now, not the faithless sweetheart, but the child of his boyish love and care.

He stooped and raised her up, and set her on the bench again, laying her head upon his shoulder, and supporting her form with his arm around her waist.

She made no resistance, but continued to weep convulsively.

As soon as he was able to command himself he spoke to her in a quiet tone.

"Odalite, why do you cry so hard? If you are going to marry this man to please yourself you should be happy, in spite of anything that I should say about it. Now, why do you grieve so much?"

"Oh! I have been so faithless to you, Le! I have been —so base to you! Oh! I wish I were dead! I wish I had died before I betrayed your trust in me, Le!"

These words came in spasmodic gasps and sighs from the white and quivering lips.

He looked at her searchingly, incisively; he could not understand her.

"Odalite," he said, suddenly, "I am full of doubt. I ask you again, and I charge you in the name of all that is pure and holy, to answer me truly: Was it of your own free will that you engaged yourself to Col. Anglesea?"

"Yes, yes! I repeat it: No one forced me, no one persuaded me. My father and my mother let me do just as I pleased," she sobbed.

"And yet, though you say this, you seem so miserable over it all! I cannot comprehend it!" muttered Leonidas Force, carrying his hand to his forehead and trying to reflect on the situation. "But—yes—I think I do now," he said, suddenly, as a light seemed to break on his mind.

Odalite raised her pale and tearful face from his shoulder and looked at him.

"I think I understand now, my dear; and it shall all come right yet."

She sorrowfully shook her head.

"Oh, yes; it shall come right. Confess now, Odalite. When your boy lover had been gone away so long that you had almost forgotten him, this foreign officer comes along and fascinates you with his splendor, as the rattle-

snake fascinates the humming bird, and you were drawn in. Now, however, that I have come back, the old-time love has revived, and you are sorry that you mistook your heart and engaged yourself to this brilliant stranger. Is it not so? Tell me, Odalite. If it is so—as I feel sure it must be—then I will put in my prior claim and stop the marriage, send the interloping foreigner back to his own country, and you and I will marry and go to housekeeping at Greenbushes, according to our lifelong engagement. That is, if the old love has revived, as of course it has," he concluded, looking eagerly in her face.

She did not answer him. She could not.

Was the old, true love revived, indeed?

No! for the sweet, sacred love of childhood had never died, never failed, but burned now a pure fire that wasted her life.

Was she sorry that she had engaged herself to that man?

So sorry, at least, stern necessity had compelled her to do so, that now death would have been a welcome release.

But she could not tell Leonidas this.

He waited for her answer for a few moments, and then continued:

"Does that grave silence give consent, my Odalite? You are sorry? While your sailor sweetheart was so far off and so long away that you had almost forgotten what he looked like, you let your fancy be taken by this fine foreigner, with his fine social position and his wealth. But now your sailor lad has come home again, and you see him, and you know whom it is you really love, you are sorry for what you were misled into doing. But don't cry any more. You shall not be compelled to marry that man, since you do not wish to, even though you did accept him of your own free will! for you had no right to accept him, you know; you were engaged to me. But to think that he has kissed you!" exclaimed the

youth, with a jealous pang, as he remembered the usual manner of sealing such an acceptance.

"Oh, no, no, Le! He has never kissed me—never, never kissed me—and he never shall until I cease to be myself and become his property, a body without a soul, which cannot help itself," said Odalite, with a woeful, wintry smile of triumph and defiance breaking through the cold rain of her tears.

"You—you—you have never let him kiss you—not even when you accepted him!" exclaimed Le, in pleased surprise.

"No; not then; nor ever! No; nor ever shall, until I become his slave in marriage!" exclaimed the girl, with a dangerous sparkle in her eyes.

"But that shall never be! Why, Odalite, you speak not only as if you do not like the man, but as if you really hate him; and that being so, you shall not marry him! I will put a stop to that at once! I have the first right to you by a long distance—the only right to you, indeed—and—and I'll throttle him—confound him!—before he shall have a hair of your head!"

"Oh, Le, hush! hush! You don't know! You mistake! Le, I must marry him! Do you understand? I must, I say!' wailed Odalite, wringing her hands.

"And you shall not, I say, because you do not want to. Your promise to him goes for nothing beside my claims," said the youth, in a tone of gay defiance.

"But, Le! Le! I—I—I want to marry him! I do indeed!" she cried, again bursting into tears and weeping violently.

He drew back from her in amazement, staring at her, while she repeated and reiterated her words, that she really wished to marry Col. Anglesea.

"I cannot comprehend you at all, Odalite. My heart aches for your evident suffering; but I cannot comprehend it. I almost fear that you are not quite sane! If you really please yourself in marrying Anglesea—as you

insist that you do—why should you be so miserable over it all?"

"Oh, Le! as I told you before, it is because—because I feel that I am acting so basely by you!—oh, my dear! the thought almost maddens me!" she sobbed.

"And is it indeed for me that the gentle heart suffers so much?" questioned Le, utterly subdued by her sorrow and humility. "Do not cry, Odalite. I was cruel, and brutal, and most unmanly to blame you so much a while ago. I am sorry and ashamed of having done so, Odalite. I have no excuse to offer, unless it is that the suddenness and the bitterness of my disappointment threw me off my balance. Forgive me, Odalite. And do not spend another thought or shed another tear over me. Poor, little, tender Odalite! Do not mind me, little one! I—I—I shall get over this when I feel sure that you are happy. Do not grieve so! I shall never blame you any more, dear! I mourn that I ever could have been such a wretch as to blame you, for you could not help what has happened. I was away at the antipodes—had been there for years. He was in the house with you for three months. And—and—I have noticed—even I—what a fascination some of these handsome, brilliant soldiers exercise over young girls! You were fascinated, and your affections were won before you knew it. You did not mean to be drawn away from me any more than the boat means to be sucked into the whirlpool! You could not avert your fate any more than the boat could. I do not condemn you, Odalite. And I shall always—always love—no! I must not love another man's bride, even though he has stolen her from me; but I will always care for you as for a dear and only sister. There! there! do not cry any more. It is all for the best! All for the best!" he concluded, in a broken voice, that all his effort failed to steady.

"Le! oh, Le! I am so miserable—so miserable! Oh, Le!" she cried, looking wildly up into his eyes and then

staring fixedly down upon the sea at their feet—"oh, Le! I wonder would the merciful Lord forgive me if—if——" She paused and pointed downward.

Leonidas shuddered, but controlled himself. He now believed the girl to be laboring under a temporary fit of insanity. He took her hand, raised her up, and drawing her arm within his own, said, gently:

"Come, dear, let me take you home to your mother."

She silently assented, and he led her up the hill, through the wood to the lawn gate, and across the lawn to the house.

They had not spoken a word since leaving the shore.

Le took her into the house, and into the sitting room usually occupied by Mrs. Force.

That lady sat, as was her custom, in her low sewing chair beside her worktable in the angle of the fireplace and the side window.

She arose as they entered and looked anxiously from one to the other.

Le led his companion up to her and said, in a broken voice:

"She has told me all about it. And yet I do not understand it in the least. See! she wants attention."

Mrs. Force received the half-fainting girl in her arms, and guided her to a large, cushioned chair, which Le hastened to push forward.

When Odalite was seated and reclining against the high, cushioned back, Le lifted her hand, pressed it to his lips, and turned to leave the room.

Mrs. Force followed him into the hall.

"Where are you going, Le?" she inquired.

"I don't know—I don't know! I feel lost! Like Adam turned out of Eden! And without my Eve—without my Eve!" he groaned.

"Bear it like a man, Le! You are very young, and—there are many lovely girls in the world in your reach."

"Oh, don't, Aunt Elfrida! don't! Never mind me! Go in to Odalite—she needs you."

"Le, do not leave the house—at least, till you see your uncle," pleaded the lady.

"Oh, no, I shall not go away at once. I shall do nothing hastily, to hurt her. I hurt her enough this morning, the Lord knows!" said the youth, with a heavy sigh.

Mrs. Force looked up inquiringly.

"Oh, yes," continued Le, "I behaved like a brute! I went out of my head, I think—when she first told me—and I raged at her! raged at the tender, defenseless, little creature—like the wild beast that I was!"

"Oh, Le, it was natural, my poor lad!'

"I was a savage! brutal! beastly!devilish!—but I was out of my mind! And she never defended herself, only cried—cried for me! I wish I had dropped dead before I spoke a word to hurt her! But the devil took me unawares, and drove me out of my senses."

"I do not wonder, Le."

"But there, Aunt Elfrida. Go to her! I will walk on the porch for a while."

Le's appearance on the porch was the signal for such a reception, or, rather, such an ovation, as could only be seen on a Southern plantation, and upon some such occasion as the present.

The news of the young midshipman's return—or "the young master's," as they chose to call him, in view of his relations, present and prospective, to the family of Mondreer—had spread far and wide among the negroes, and they came flocking up, men, women and children, to shake hands with him and welcome him home.

Some of the elder negroes, with "itching palms," belabored him with begging questions of—

"Wot yer got fur yer ole Aunt Mole, honey?"

"Wot yer done home f'om furrin' parts fur yer ole Uncle Bob?"

And so forth and so forth.

Le promised one and all a present as soon as ever his sea chest should arrive.

And yet they might have stayed there all day but for the opportune appearance of Aunt Lucy on the scene.

She had watched from an upper window the gathering of the crowd, and now she swooped down upon them.

"Shame o' yerselbes!" she said. "Come yere bodderin' the young marse fust minute as eber he get in de house! Whar's yer manners?"

"Don't scold them, Aunt Lucy," pleaded Le. "They came to welcome me home."

"Dey come to beg, dat's wot dey come for—to beg. It's a habit dey gibs deirselves," said the unrelenting Lucy.

"It is a habit they cannot indulge in more than once in three years, where I am concerned. I do not come home every day."

"An' a werry good fing, too, for it's a werry bad habit."

"What, coming home?"

"No, sah. Dem niggahs is a werry bad habit as oughtn't to be 'dulged in once—no, not once. Now cl'ar out wid yer all, an' go 'bout yer work."

This order was addressed to the negroes, who, overawed by the authority of the chief house servant, began to steal away from the house.

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## CHAPTER XV

### LE'S FIERY TRIAL

Le was still walking up and down on the porch, when Mr. Force rode up, followed by his mounted groom.

He did not see Le, who was partly shaded by the bare tangle of the climbing rose vines on the trelliswork.

He threw himself out of his saddle, threw his bridle to his groom, and came up the steps.

"Ho, my boy!" he shouted, as he caught sight of the youth. "Is that you, really? Welcome! welcome! I am delighted to see you!"

And he seized Le by both hands, and shook them heartily.

"When did you get home?" he continued, in the same cordial tone.

"Only this morning," answered Le, trying to command himself, for the sudden sight of Odalite's father and the jubilant cordiality of his address nearly upset the poor fellow's balance.

Had his uncle no feeling, knowing, as he must know, that he, Le, had come home joyfully expecting to marry Odalite, only to meet with a bitter disappointment?

"Come into the parlor! Come into the parlor! It is too cold out here! You look quite blue! Come in, and let's get a better view of you!" continued Mr. Force, leading the way into the house, followed by Le.

In the hall he threw off his riding coat, drew off his long, India rubber boots, and then entered the parlor, which was on the opposite side from Mrs. Force's sitting room.

It was a medium-sized, wainscoted room, with two front window and one side window. It was carpeted and upholstered in dark crimson, and had a large, open wood fire burning in the ample chimney.

"Take that chair! I'll take this," said Mr. Force, pushing one armchair toward Le with his foot, and throwing himself into the other.

Thus they sat in opposite corners.

"Now tell me! When did your ship get into port?"

"Yesterday morning, and I hurried immediately down her to see—to see my—to—to—meet the bitterest disappointment of my life, Uncle Abel!" said the youth,

faltering, hesitating, but determined to come to the point at last.

"Oh, come, come! Tut, tut, tut! She was only a child when you went away, if you are referring to Odalite!" said Mr. Force, in a cheery tone.

"Yes, Uncle Abel, I am referring to Odalite, and speaking of the most heartbreaking disappointment that ever crushed a man," said the youth.

"Nonsense, dear lad! You know nothing of heartbreaking troubles of any sort, or you would not magnify this one! You will get over it in a month."

"It was the cherished love and hope and faith of years."

"A dream, my boy, of which this is the awakening. A dream, in which I, too, shared! Le, lad, you must know that I am just as much disappointed as you can be! It was the desire of my life that you and Odalite should marry, and in time succeed us here, and make the two great manors of Mondreer and Greenbushes into one mammoth estate. I am disappointed in this. And if I ever permitted myself to grieve over the inevitable, I should feel very sorry for myself as well as for you!"

"It was so sudden, so unexpected! Why, her last letter to me, received at Spezzia, and written not two months ago, was so kind! She must have changed very quickly," said poor Le.

"No, I think it must have been gradually. I think she was deeply infatuated before she realized her state. And then I know she struggled, poor, dear child!—struggled until she nearly broke her heart—to keep faithful to you and to please me. It was only from her suitor that I heard at last of her distress. Then, as she meekly left her fate entirely in my hands, I conquered my own ambition and told the child to follow the dictates of her own heart. What else could a father do? But even now, though she has her own way in this matter, she is not content! She frets about you, Le!"

"Oh! and this is the gentle, tender creature whom I could reproach so fiercely—dog that I was!" said Le, who seemed to feel the necessity of confession to poor Odalite's parents.

"You, Le?"

"Yes, I! When she made me understand that she had broken her engagement with me and had promised to marry that Englishman, I tell you, Uncle Abel, I went on at her like a raving maniac! Satan took possession of me! I—could bang out my own brains against the wall, when I think of it!"

"Don't! It would spoil the paper, and do nobody any good but the coroner and the undertaker! It was inevitable that you should have gone into a passion, Le! Your provocation would have upset a doctor of divinity, if it had taken him by surprise. Think no more of it, my boy! I dare say she has forgiven it!"

"She! the blessed child! She never once resented it—that is what kills me! She never opened her lips in self-defense, or self-excuse! Oh, I could beat my——"

"Pray, don't, I say! It would make a mess in a tidy parlor! I dare say she thought she was without any excuse for disappointing you and me of our pet plan, and all for the sake of that puncheon of an Englishman! But girls are weak vessels. I never knew one worth having, except my own noble wife! But perhaps she has spoiled me for appreciating any other woman, even my own daughter."

"Yes, Aunt Elfrida is the most excellent of the earth, I do believe," assented Le; but without the interest in the subject which the words might have implied.

"The most perfect woman in person, soul and spirit that ever was created!"

"Who is 'the most perfect woman in person, soul and spirit that ever was created'?" inquired a voice behind them.

Mr. Force turned and saw Col. Anglesea approaching them.

Both the gentlemen, who were seated, immediately arose.

Mr. Force presented his young relative to his guest.

The midshipman and the colonel bowed coldly and stiffly, while they eyed each other with ill-repressed antagonism.

"Who is 'the most perfect woman in person, soul and spirit that ever was created'?" again queried Col. Anglesea, as the party seated themselves around the fire.

"My wife," answered Abel Force.

Angus Anglesea threw back his head and laughed aloud—then recovering himself, said—to one who, unseen, had just joined the group: "I beg your pardon, Mrs. Force! I really could not help laughing, to hear your good husband praise you so—unconsciously—before your face! You know."

"I did not know that Elfrida was there," said Mr. Force, half offended at—he knew not what!—something that he vaguely perceived, but could not specify.

Mrs. Force had turned deadly pale, and her lips were compressed and her blue eyes glittering as she took her seat.

It was fortunate, at that moment, that Miss Meeke and the two younger girls entered the parlor, simultaneously with the ringing of the dinner bell.

Mrs. Force arose and took the arm of the young midshipman and led the way to the dining room, followed by the party.

"I hope Miss Force is not indisposed," said Col. Anglesea, missing Odalite from her place at the table.

"She does not feel very well, but may perhaps join us in the drawing room," said Mrs. Force, as they all took their seats around the board.

Mr. Force sought to enliven the meal with gay conversation, but signally failed.

Col. Anglesea affected to treat the young midshipman with great condescension, but equally failed; for Le ignored and disregarded him to the verge of actual rudeness—either not hearing his remarks or else answering them in monosyllables and giving all his attention to his little cousins, Wynnette and Elva, who were seated, by their own choice, the one on his right and the other on his left.

Mrs. Force did not attempt to converse, and Miss Meeke, chilled by the social coldness around her, kept silence.

In less than an hour the uncomfortable meal was over and the party withdrew to the drawing room.

Le then arose to bid them good-night.

"No, no, Leonidas, my lad! Don't go! Not yet, at least. Wait; I have something to say to you. Excuse me, friends! Come into the library with me, Le," said Mr. Force, rising, drawing the arm of the younger man within his own and passing out.

When they reached the little book room in the rear of Mrs. Force's sitting room, and which the family dignified by the name of library, Mr. Force said:

"Sit down, Le." And taking a seat himself, pushed another to his companion.

"Now, Le," he said, when both were seated, "where were you going?"

"To Greenbushes, of course. I ought to be there to look after my property."

"Yes, yes; but Beever don't expect you to-night and has not got things ready for you; and besides it is too late. Don't leave us to-night, Le. Don't hurry away! Your doing so would hurt Odalite. She would think she had driven you away."

"Well, then, I will not go. I have hurt Odalite enough. If my going would hurt her I would stay here and stand that ruffian's insolence until he takes her away.

I beg your pardon, uncle, for calling your intended son-in-law a ruffian."

"Oh, fire away, my lad! You have every right to swear! I feel like joining you."

"His insolence in laughing when you praised my aunt so much!"

"But I did not praise her above her merits. Why, just look at her, Le! Nearly forty years old, and the very handsomest woman in the country, and as noble and perfect in mind as in person!"

"Yes; and he laughed!"

"Look here, Le. You know he was a brother officer of my wife's brother, and an old friend of hers. Now, I'll tell you what, I often think that he was a rejected suitor of Lady Elfrida Glennon. And the memory of it makes him sore and sarcastic at times. Many little things in their intercourse makes me think that sometimes. Bear with him, Le, as I shall do, for Odalite's sake. Now shall we return to the drawing room?"

"If you please."

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## CHAPTER XVI

### LE'S MYSTERIOUS MOVEMENTS

Le remained at Mondreer, only riding over to Greenbushes every day to superintend the repairs and refurnishing of his house.

He never met Odalite except at meal times, and then their chairs were so placed that neither need look in the face of the other. Odalite's seat was near the head of the table. Le's near the foot, on the same side. They merely greeted each other on entering the dining room, and that was all. Mr. and Mrs. Force treated their young relative with the most delicate consideration.

Col. Anglesea treated his defeated rival with offensive condescension.

Le tried to ignore the colonel's existence, and found his greatest comfort in the company of his little cousins. Their warm, sincere love and sympathy was as balm to his bruised heart.

The children had successfully passed their home examination by the father, and their holidays had already commenced, though it was a full week before Christmas. And thus they were able to give their sailor cousin a great deal of their society.

The mother and father did not interfere. They were glad enough of any comfort or solace they could afford Le, to occupy or amuse his mind, and keep his fingers and his scalping knife off Anglesea's hair.

The children used often to walk over with Le to Greenbushes in the morning, spend the whole day there with their cousin, and return with him in the evening.

But, in consideration for him, they never alluded to the aproaching wedding. They only kept their eyes and ears open, like the sharp little foxes that they were.

One day, however, when all three were walking through the wintry woods on their way to Greenbushes, Le himself, for the first time, alluded to the subject.

"How do you like your intended brother-in-law?" he inquired.

"What! that British beer barrel? I mean that English gentleman? I hate him! I detest him! I loathe him! I abhor him! And if there is any stronger word in the English or any other language, I *that* him!" exclaimed Wynnette, clenching her fist and grinding her teeth.

"I say my prayers three times a day not to hate him; but, oh, dear!" sighed little Elva.

"And I'll tell you what it is, Le. She hates him worse than I do," added Wynnette.

"My child! 'She?' Who?" exclaimed Le, starting, and coming to a dead halt.

"Why, Odalite."

"Wynnette, do you know what you are saying, dear?" demanded Le, in great agitation.

They had now reached Chincapin Creek bridge, and all had come to a stop.

"Do you know what you are saying, Wynnette?" anxiously repeated Le.

"Yes, indeed I do. And I know it is true. Odalite hates and scorns and loathes Col. Anglesea!" said the child, speaking in her intense way, with doubled fist, set teeth and gleaming eyes.

"Did she tell you so?"

"Why should she tell me? No; she never did. But all the same I would pledge my immortal soul upon it that she does."

"Why do you think so, then?"

"Why? Now, Le, where are your eyes and your common sense? I tell you disgust and abhorrence take possession of Odalite the minute he aprpoaches her, and stick out all over her like the spikes on a hedgehog. Bah! bah! Tchut! Tchis!" hissed the intense little creature.

"My Lord, if I thought so!"

"You had better think so. I tell you I believe if she is made to marry that beat—I mean that person—something awful will happen."

"'Made' to marry, my dear Wynnette! Why, she wants to do so."

"She don't! she don't! she don't!"

"But she told me so herself."

"I don't care what she told you. She don't."

"My dear, please to remember that Odalite never tells what is not true. And she told me that she wanted to marry Anglesea."

"Yes, I know. She told me so, too, not ten minutes

before you came home. But how can I believe she does when I see that it is breaking her poor heart, and crazing her brain, and killing her? Tell me that."

"Oh, child! I can tell you nothing!" groaned Le. "I am even more mystified than you are! That this girl, who is truth itself, should insist that she wants to marry a man whose very presence fills her with loathing, is a mystery I cannot fathom!"

The children were by this time seated on a log at the end of the bridge—the same log on which, two weeks before, Odalite had been seated when she was surprised by Col. Anglesea.

Le stood near them, leaning with his back against the railings and his head bowed in deep thought.

Suddenly he started, and threw his hand to his head.

"What's the matter, Le?" inquired litle Elva, while Wynnette stared.

"A remembered dream, or vision, that came to me three times on my homeward voyage," replied the young man, gravely.

"Oh, tell us!" exclaimed both the children in duet, with all their childish interest in the marvelous excited to the highest pitch.

"It is a vision of midnight on midocean—the blackness of darkness above, below, around, beneath. Suddenly into this opaque darkness glows a spark of red light. It increases, spreads, and shoots upward, revealing—a ship on fire! Showing the deck crowded with dark figures! Only one fearfully distinct form—the form of Odalite. She stands on the top of the bulwarks, clothed in white raiment, with her arms raised on high, her face turned upward, her hair streaming!—flames around and above her, the ocean beneath. I heard her call to me, speak to me:

" 'Le, I do not want to leave you, but see! I must take the water to escape the fire!'

"And suddenly, as if the burning ship were swallowed

up in the midnight sea, the vision vanished. Three times I had this vision, children. And it troubled me, but in the excitement of my home-coming I forgot it until now. Now I remember it, and receive it as a warning."

"I can read it! I can read it!" said Wynnette, with her weird, eldritch look and tone. "I can read it, and it is just what I believed before I heard of it! Odalite is driven somehow, by some one or something, not only to marry, but want to marry, Anglesea to save herself from some evil! Oh! I feel it even in my bones! And is she is driven quite into the marriage, I tell you there will be some awful tragedy like that of the Bride of Lammermoor! Anglesea will be found in the morning with his wizen slit—I mean with his throat cut—and Odalite wil be sitting in the ashes gibbering and mopping and mowing like an idiot!"

"Oh! oh! oh!" cried little Elva, covering her face with her hands and shivering through all her small frame.

"See, you have frightened the child, Wynnette! You should not say such wild, extravagant things, my dear!" said Le, rebukingly.

"I said it to fetch you! I mean I said it to make an impression on you!" retorted Wynnette.

"Oh, Le! can't you be Young Lochinvar and carry her off from the wedding?" pleaded little Elva.

"Hardly, my darling!

" 'The fair Ellen of Young Lochinvar'

was willing to be carried off, and Odalite is not, which makes all the difference, you know!"

"Oh, but she would be glad afterward!" persisted Elva.

"Oh, hush, Elf! He won't try it! The age of chivalry is past!' indignantly replied Wynnette.

"We will walk on," said Le.

And they resumed their tramp toward Greenbushes, where they arrived in about another hour, and where they spent the day, returning home in the evening.

"Oh, Le! Sweet, dear, darling Le! won't you please carry off Odalite, just like Young Lochinvar did fair Ellen? Oh, please, Le! It would be so easy! You could have George saddled and brought round to the front door. George is the fastest and the strongest horse in the stables, and you could snatch her up and run out with her and be in the saddle and away before folks could get over their surprise. And she would be glad afterward! I know she would! Weren't the Sabine women glad afterward that the Roman youth had carried them away?" argued Elva, fresh from her school history. "And, Le, you could do it very easily!"

"Yes, I could, very easily," grimly assented the youth.

"And you will, won't you?"

"No, my precious! It would not do! Not in these days, darling! With all the examples of romance, poetry and history to inspire me, I must not do it! If I were to attempt such a feat, I would be a felon, not a hero, my pet."

"Then I wish you were a felon!" was the astounding conclusion of Elva, as she passed him by and entered the house.

From this day Le watched Odalite more closely, and he discovered that, on all occasions when she was in company with Anglesea, she treated him with open contempt, except when her father was present; then indeed she seemed to put constraint upon herself and to treat her betrothed with decent respect. Was this done to avert any suspicions of the real state of her feelings from her father's mind?

From this day, also, Le was often absent on errands that took him from the neighborhood and sometimes kept him over night. And when interrogated by his

uncle, or any member of the family, as to the business that called him away, he would give evasive answers.

But all noticed that Le's spirits were much improved, so that he was more like the ruddy, jubilant Le that he had been in the past, than at any other time since his return home. He walked with a light step, spoke in a brisk tone, sang snatches of sea songs and winked knowingly at the wondering children.

Meantime the wedding came on apace.

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## CHAPTER XVII

### ROSEMARY HEDGE

"Oldfield, December 20, 18—.

"Sukey: I saw Miss Sibby Bayard's Gad go by the house this morning on the mule, with a bag of wheat before him, taking it to old Killman's mill to be ground, and I know she is going to have hot biscuits for supper out of the new wheat; so I want you to come and bring Rosemary with you, and we will walk over there and take tea with her. You ride Jo, and take the child up behind you, and let the boy walk. Dolly."

"Sukey" was Miss Grandiere, a tall, handsome and dignified maiden lady of about forty years of age. She had a shapely head, regular features, fair complexion, blue eyes and brown hair, brushed away from her forehead, and twisted into a roll on the top of her head.

She wore a plain, dark, calico gown, made with a short waist, tight sleeves, and long, narrow skirt, and a plain, white, muslin handkerchief around her neck, and pinned firmly across her bosom.

She stood upon the rudest sort of porch, built of rough

pine boards, and shaded by hop vines, now withered under the wintry air.

Yet homely as were her attire and surroundings, it seemed as inappropriate for any one to call the stately Susannah Grandiere "Sukey," as it is for some writers to refer to England's magnificent Elizabeth as "Queen Bess."

Beside this dignified dame stood a very dainty, delicate and pathetic-looking little girl of about twelve years of age, who leaned half fondly, half lazily against the lady's side.

She was Miss Grandiere's niece, shadow and worshiper. Her name was Rosemary Hedge, and she was the only and orphan child of Miss Grandiere's widowed sister, Mrs. Dorothy Hedge, the writer of the note.

Rosemary was a slight, tiny, fragile creature, with a mere slip of a figure, and mites of hands and feet. She had a thin face, a pale rose complexion, large, light blue eyes, and black hair, which she wore as children do now —partly banged across her forehead, but mostly hanging down her shoulders. She was clothed in a prim, blue, calico gown, with a short waist, high neck, tight sleeves, and a skirt all the way down to her feet, which were shod in coarse leather shoes over home-knit, gray stockings.

The child was looking up to her aunt in great anxiety while the latter read the letter brought by the negro boy, Dan, who stood, torn hat in hand, holding the bridle of a short, fat, white cob, Jovial by name, commonly called "Jo."

"Is it for me to go home? Oh, Aunt Sukey, is it for me to go home?" uneasily inquired the little girl, as the lady folded the letter.

"No, child, no," soothingly replied the lady. "It is only to ask us both to ride four miles, and walk one, for the sake of eating 'Hot Biscuits,' in capital letters, for supper."

"She say—Miss Dolly say—how you and Miss Ro'-mery mus' ride Jo, and me to lead him," here explained the ragged negro boy.

"Just like my poor sister Hedge! Well, it does not matter much. I was thinking about going over to Oldfield to-day; but all the horses here being at work, I had to give it up. Anyhow, I had certainly made up my mind to go down on the bay, before the great Force wedding, for as the ceremony is to be performed at All Faith Church, it will be much more convenient to attend it from Oldfield than from here. Are the ladies at Oldfield invited to the wedding, do you know, Dan?"

"Oh, Lor'! yes'm. Ebrybody is 'wited, an' de church all dessicated full o' holly an' ebbergreens, like Chris'-mas!"

"Decorated, you mean, Dan."

"Yes'm, desecrated."

"Now then, Dan, give the horse some water, and let him rest while you get something to eat. We have just now done dinner, and the servants are taking theirs in the kitchen. Aunt Moll will give you yours, and by the time you have finished we shall be ready to start. Come, Rosemary."

And taking her niece by the hand, Miss Grandiere stepped from the porch into a plainly furnished bedchamber, which was her own private apartment—sitting room by day, bedroom by night—and which she shared with her favorite niece whenever the little girl happened to be staying with her, which was, indeed, most of the time.

"Aunt Sukey's room" was the best bedchamber in the farmhouse, being on the first floor, in the rear of the building, and opening upon the vine-shaded porch on the outside, and into the comomn hall on the inside.

On a line with the porch was the best parlor, and on the other side of the hall there was a front dining room and a back sitting room.

Although "Aunt Sukey's room" was the best, it was a very plain apartment, with whitewashed walls and bare floor.

On each side of the door, as you entered from the porch, was a window, making the place very light and cheerful. This was the east side. On the south side was an open fireplace, with a bright, oak-wood fire burning in it, defended by a wire fender. Above it was a mantelpiece, adorned by a fine engraving of the Nativity in a plain, wooden frame, and flanked by two brass candlesticks. In the corner was a triangular cupboard with glass doors reaching from floor to ceiling, and filled with a collection of rare old china which would have been the envy and despair of a wealthy and fashionable collector; for one of Aunt Sukey's grandfathers and two of her uncles and one of her brothers had been captains of East India merchantmen.

On the west side stood a high, old-fashioned chest of drawers, whose top was covered with a fair, white, linen cloth, and adorned by an old-time looking glass mounted on its own box of small dressing drawers. On each side of this glass were two round bandboxes of blue paper, containing two poke bonnets, as common then as now.

Finally, on the north side of the room, with its head against the wall, stoood the pride of the chamber—a four-post, mahogany bedstead with white, dimity curtains, and with a full, high, feather bed and bolsters and pillows heaped up, and covered—the bed with a home-made, blue-and-white counterpane, and the bolster and pillows by cases of homespun white linen.

All along the walls of the room, between every piece of furniture, stood plain, chip-bottom pine chairs. In the middle of the room, as being in constant use, was a chip-bottom rocker and a child's low chair of the same material. A large spinning wheel stood in the corner between the window and the fireplace, and before it

stood a negro girl, spinning. This was Miss Sukey's own maid, Henny.

Miss Susannah Grandiere did not live in her own house, although she was a woman of ample means and might have done so. She divided her time about equally between the two farmhouses—Grove Hill, the home of her married sister, Mrs. William Elk, where she was staying at present; and Oldfield, the home of her married brother, Thomas Grandiere, and also of their widowed sister, Mrs. Dorothy Hedge, to which she had just been invited.

These two places were always familiarly referred to by their respective owners as "Up in the Forest" and "Down on the Bay"—Grove Hill being "Up in the Forest," and Oldfield "Down on the Bay."

In both these farmhouses there was a room set apart and known as "Aunt Sukey's room," and her treasures, her Lares and Penates, were about equally divided between them.

These rooms, however, when unoccupied, were at the disposal of any visitor who might be staying at either house during the absence of Miss Grandiere.

But whether Aunt Sukey sojourned at Oldfield or at Grove Hill, her quaint, little orphan niece, Rosemary, was always her inseparable companion—an arrangement that was not displeasing to the widowed mother, who said in her heart:

"If anything should happen to me, Sukey will take care of Rosemary." Or, "If Sukey should never marry, Rosemary will be her heiress."

Even the negroes said:

"Miss Ro'm'ry is mo' like Miss Sukey's own chile dan Miss Dolly's darter, anyways."

They had now been staying "Up in the Forest" ever since harvest, and their manner of life was quaint enough, especially in the evenings.

When the day was nearly spent, and the family sup-

per was over, and Uncle Billy had gone out to see that barn and stable and sheepfold were well secured, and all else right outside, and when Aunt Molly had gone her rounds in poultry yard and dairy, and was putting her children to bed, then Aunt Sukey, Rosemary and the negro girl, Henny, would retire into Aunt Sukey's room, to utilize the lingering light of the short winter day by working at whatever tasks were on hand, for never did holiday begin until the candle should be lighted.

It was some homely, country work always. And Aunt Sukey would probably be knitting, Rosemary sewing together scraps for a patchwork quilt and the negro girl, Henny, seated on a stool, would be engaged in winding off the yarn from a "jack" into balls.

It was usually little Rosemary who would give the signal for stopping work, by saying, in pleading tones:

"Aunt Sukey, ain't it most time to let down the blinds and light the candle?"

Whereupon the negro girl would set her reel jack in the corner, and untie and drop the paper blinds before the two windows, and light the tallow dip on the mantelpiece.

Rosemary would roll up her "pieces," and put away her work in a little homemade chip basket, which she would hang upon its own nail.

Last of all, Aunt Sukey would draw her knitting needle from its sheaf, roll up the half-finished stocking, and put it away in a workbag hanging on a hook, near the chimney corner.

And then began the dissipations of the evening. Innocent enough dissipations, though they were howled at by some folks.

Aunt Sukey would resume her seat in the rocker.

Henny would set a little table near her mistress, and place on it the lighted candle and a pair of snuffers.

Rosemary would bring out from the top drawer of the

bureau a hoarded and treasured volume, and lay it beside them.

Then, when all were seated—the lady in her rocker the child on a little chair at her feet, and the negro girl on the floor in the corner of the chimney—Aunt Sukey would open the book, and begin where she left off the night before, and go on with the fortunes of "Evelina," "Camilla," "Clarissa Harlowe," or "Amanda Fitzallen," as the case might be; novels, which, however excellent in themselves, would scarcely be read in these days, though in those they were "devoured," so much so that if one of them appeared in any house, it was sure to go the round of the whole county, and be read to rags before it got home again, if it ever did. In this respect the neighborhood was a free, unorganized, irresponsible circulating library.

Aunt Sukey bought some books, lent some, and borrowed some, but never kept any.

So evening after evening she would read to her attentive hearers, while little Rosemary's large, blue eyes grew larger and larger with wonder and interest, and Henny's attention relaxed, and her head drooped lower and lower, as she nodded over the fire, until there seemed some danger of her falling into it.

In this manner Miss Sukey was training, all unconsciously, the mind of the most romantic little fairy that ever lived to make a romance of her own.

When the dip candle had burned nearly down to the socket Aunt Sukey knew by that sign that it was about nine o'clock. They had no other timepiece, so they went by the candle, which always burned just so long.

Then Aunt Sukey would only finish her chapter before closing her book.

Then Henny would wake up, light a fresh candle, and stand waiting orders. She need never have waited, for she knew exactly what the order would be. It was always the same formula.

"Henny, go to the storehouse, and draw a jug of fresh cider, and cork it tight. Then take the bread tray, and get a quart of flour, and a quarter of a pound of lard, and a teaspoonful of salt, and bring all in here. And don't forget the rolling board and pin, nor the hoe blade."

These would all be brought, and then Henny, having carefully washed her hands, and set the clean hoe blade to heat before the fire, would stand up to the table upon which she had placed her kneading tray, and there she would knead and afterward roll out her hoe cake, and spread it on the heated hoe to bake before the fire. She would, in fact, bake three in succession, turning them carefully, and finally placing them near the fire as they were taken off the hoe, to be kept hot until all was ready. Lastly, she would carry away all the utensils used, bring the little table to the front of the fire, and place cider, glasses, hoe cakes and china plates from the corner cupboard upon it. And the aunt and niece would sit down and "take a snack," as they called it—make a very hearty supper of very substantial food, as we should certainly say. What powers of digestion they must have had!

When they had feasted, Henny would finish what was left, clear and replace the table, replenish the fire from the wood pile outside the door, sweep the hearth, put up the fender, and bid her mistress good-night.

The aunt and niece would say their prayers, undress, and go to bed together.

This was the routine, observed every evening, that Rosemary enjoyed more than anything on the face of the earth, except—oh, yes! except going to the dancing school at Charlotte Hall, whither she was taken with her cousins at Oldfield twice a week.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE VISIT TO MISS SIBBY

JUST such an evening the two cronies had passed on the day previous to this sudden invitation to go to Miss Sibby's.

Rosemary hated to go. She knew to do so would involve the sacrifice of their evening readings.

"Oh, Aunt Sukey," she said, as she buttoned up her blue bombazet pelisse—"oh, to think that we had got into such an interesting part of 'The Children of the Abbey!' Amanda had just met Lord Mortimer! And now it will be a week, or maybe a fortnight, before we can go on with it."

"Never mind, Rosemary. Your mother lets you stay with me nearly always, and you are her only child, too, and she is a widow; so when she sends for us we must go," said Aunt Sukey.

"Oh, yes, I know; but Amanda and Lord Mortimer——"

"Never mind Amanda and Lord Mortimer; they can wait until we come back. Now roll up your quilt pieces, and we will put them in my bag. Come! are you ready?"

"Yes, Aunt Sukey, soon as I have pulled on my mits."

"Now we must go and take leave of Molly and the children," said Miss Grandiere.

But as she spoke, there entered from the door on the right of the fireplace a pretty, fragile woman of about forty-five years of age, who, with the exception of her fair skin, blue eyes and brown hair, bore not the slightest resemblance to her tall, stately and handsome sister. She was dressed in a brown, linsey gown, white apron, white neck shawl and white cap. She was closely followed by two little girls of ten and twelve years of age, fair and

blue-eyed, like their mother, with frocks that seemed to have been cut off the same piece as their mother's gown. These were the two children of the house—Erina and Melina Elk.

"Why, I have just heard from Dan that you are going Down on the Bay," said the newcomer.

"Yes; Dolly Hedge has sent for us; and as I wanted to go so as to see the wedding at All Faith on Tuesday, I think it is rather lucky that she has sent."

"How long are you going to stay?"

"Until after the wedding, certainly; perhaps longer."

"Well, I do feel so ashamed of the Forces for throwing off their own flesh and blood for the sake of a stranger and a foreigner, that I have no patience with them; and I wouldn't go to the wedding, no, not if it was next door!"

"But, Molly, the young lady fell in love with the English officer; and I think it was very noble of her father to sacrifice his own dearest hopes on the shrine of his daughter's happiness."

"Oh, don't talk to me about shrines and sacrifices! That's all out of the romances you wear your eyes out reading at night. I believe in neighbors and in kinsfolks, not in strangers and foreigners. There!"

"Well, Molly, you have a right to your own opinions, and the Forces have a right to theirs. You must admit that!"

"Yes; and the heathen have a right to theirs, I suppose you think, Sukey."

"No; that is carrying the matter too far. But goodby, Molly. We must go now. We will be back as soon as we can."

The departing ones kissed their relatives, and went out to the block, where Dan stood holding the horse.

Henny followed with a heavy shawl, which she folded and laid upon the saddle.

"Mind, girl; as soon as you have cleaned up the room,

get ready and come after us. We may stay longer than we expect Down on the Bay, so you must bring a change of clothes with you. Be sure to start from here in time to get to Oldfield before night. I don't like the idea of your going through the forest alone after dark," said Miss Grandiere.

"Nebber you fear, Miss Sukey. I be down at Olefiel' by de time yo' dere yo'se'f—fo' sundown, anyhow," said the negro girl, as she helped her mistress to climb into the saddle, and then lifted Rosemary up to a seat behind her.

"Now, Miss Rose'ry, yo' hole on tight. Put yo' arms 'roun' yo' Aunt Sukey's waist, and hole on tight. Don't you slip off! Look'ee here, yo' nigger Dan; yo' walk 'longside ob dis chile, case she fall off. Tell yo' wot, nigger, ef dis chile fall off an' break her arm or anyfing, yo' better not show yo' face at Olefiel'—nor likewise here, needer! Yo' hears me, doan yo'?"

"Oh, Aunt Henny, I am not going to fall off; nor neither would Dan let me. Poor Dan! Don't scold him beforehand," pleaded Rosemary.

"High, chile, 'twould be too late to scold arterward. Wot I sez is, do you' scoldin' an' yo' whippin' 'fo' dere's any cause fer it—'taint no good to do it arterward; 'twon't ondo nuffin' wot's done," said Henny; but her wisdom was lost on the party, who had already started on their way, aunt and niece riding double, and Dan walking beside the horse.

Their way lay over snow-covered ground, through bare woods, up and down rolling hills, and over frozen streams.

It was three o'clock in the afternoon when they emerged from the last piece of woods and entered upon a cultivated clearing, in which stood an old-fashioned farmhouse, with a steep roof with gable ends, dormer windows, and wide porches, surrounded by its barn, granaries and negro quarters.

As Miss Grandiere pulled up at the horse block before the door, a lady, tall, stately, handsome, with a fair complexion, blue eyes and brown hair, very like Miss Grandiere herself, and handsomely dressed in a puce-colored silk pelisse, and a beaver bonnet, appeared at the door, and said:

"You haven't time to stop, Sukey. Sally and the children are all well, and are in the storeroom picking over apples. You can see them when we come home this evening; but now we must hurry; so you just get down and set the child in your seat, and let Dan lead the horse, and we will walk through the woods to Miss Sibby's. I don't know what is going on there, but something is."

"I thought it was hot biscuits out of the new flour," said Miss Grandiere.

"Yes, it is that, too," replied Mrs. Hedge, without perceiving the sarcasm; "but there is something else—something that that wild young blade, Roland Bayard, and that young Midshipman Force, have on foot. I know there is!"

"Roland Bayard! Has he come home?"

"So Gad says. I couldn't get much out of that nigger, though. He said he was in a hurry, and hadn't time to stop. He said he had to carry that bag of wheat to the mill and get it ground, and carry it back home in time to make bread for supper; so you see I couldn't get much out of him."

By this time the new order of procession was formed, and the sisters walked on together, followed by little Rosemary on the saddle, and Dan leading the horse.

"I should not think," said Miss Grandiere, "that young Midshipman Force would feel very much like skylarking after such a disappointment and mortification as he has had."

"No would pou, now? But then he was a mere boy, and she only a child, when they were engaged; and then

after three years, you know, both might have changed their minds," suggested practical Mrs. Hedge.

"I don't know," sighed sentimental Miss Grandiere.

"Well, I tell you, of all the scapegrace, devil-may-care, never-do-well, neck-or-nothing boys that ever lived or died in this world, that Roland Bayard is the very worst! I am sorry young Force has anything to do with him."

"I don't think he is evil at heart," pleaded Miss Grandiere.

" 'Evil at heart' " repeated Mrs. Hedge, reflectively. "No, perhaps not."

"He is a little wild, to be sure."

" 'A little wild!' He is enough to break Miss Sibby's heart!"

"I don't see why. He is no kin to her."

"No; but she loves him as if he were her only son. She liked to have cried her eyes out when he went to sea, you know."

"Yes, I know. And yet it was as good a career as he could enter upon. The merchant service is not so genteel as the navy, to be sure, but, then, it is really more promising, in a lucrative point of view, and a young man of no family need not mind about the gentility."

"Yet that is just what grieved Miss Sibby's heart—that her adopted nephew should be obliged to gratify his passion for the sea by entering the merchant service instead of the United States Navy."

"Poor Miss Sibby! It is hard to say whether her pride in her own descent or her love for her adopted nephew is her ruling passion," concluded Miss Grandiere, with a smile.

Their walk had now brought them to the borders of a frozen creek, on the other side of which stood a small farmhouse, surrounded by a few outbuildings.

This was "Forest Rest," or "Miss Sibby's," as it was frequently called.

At the open door stood a short, stout old lady, in a homespun brown linsey gown, a white apron, and a white cap.

She had seen the approach of visitors from her window, and had come out to welcome them.

"How do? How do?" she exclaimed, holding out both hands and shaking them, right and left. "How dee do? Why, I'm mighty proud to see you! Come in! Come in out'n the cold!" she added, as she led her visitors through the front door that opened immediately into the principal room of the house.

It was a large, homely room, with whitewashed walls, bare floor, large open fireplace, and two front windows, shaded with blue paper blinds. It was plainly furnished with a pine table, chip chairs, corner cupboard, tall clock, and all the usual features of the rustic parlor. Its great redeeming point was the glowing fire of oak logs that burned in the broad chimney.

"Come right here and sit down, and get a good warm before you take off your things. Make yourself comfortable, sez I! never mind looks," said Miss Sibby, drawing chairs close to the hearth for her half frozen guests.

"So Roland has come home, I hear, Miss Sibby," began Mrs. Hedge, as she stretched her benumbed fingers over the fire.

"Yes, he has, safe and sound; thanks be to the Lord! He got home the very selfsame day that young Le Force arrove; though nyther of them knowed anything about the other's coming 'til they met by accident at old Luke Barriere's store. Now, wasn't that a coinference? 'Truth is stranger nor friction,' sez I."

"Is he going to sea again, Miss Sibby?" inquired Miss Grandiere.

"Well, I reckon sooner or later he must go, if he won't do nothing else. A young youth must do something for a living, sez I; and if he don't do one thing he must do

another, sez I. But I do hope next time as he may get a berth along of your brother George. When is Capting Grandiere expected home?"

"I don't know. He was at Rio de Janeiro when we heard from him last."

"Ah me! so far as that? That's on the coast of Guinea, ain't it?"

"No; Brazil, South America."

"Well, Lord knows that's far enough. I did hope as the *Kitty* would be coming home soon, and Roland could get a berth 'long o' Capting Grandiere. But there's nothing but disappointment in this world, sez I!"

"The worst case of disappointment I know of is that of poor young Leonidas Force!" said Mrs. Hedge.

"Now ain't it, though" chimed in Miss Sibby.

"To come home to meet his sweetheart, and find her just about to be married to another man!"

"And him a furriner! That's what makes me sick! A furriner! Them as has the least to do with furriners, sez I, comes the best off, sez I! It's all the gal's fault, too! She fell in love along of this furriner! And her father, he give in to her, 'cause she cried and took on! But, Lor'! what could you expect of the young thing, sez I? 'Trot sire, trot dam,' sez I, 'the colt will never pace,' sez I! And you may take my word for that."

"What do you mean, Miss Sibby? How do you apply the proverb to this case?" inquired Miss Grandiere.

"Why, don't you see? What did her daddy do? 'Stead o' marrying of some old neighbor's darter, like you, Miss Sukey——"

"No, I thank you!" put in Miss Grandiere.

"Or me," continued Miss Sibby, without noticing the interruption, "or some other, as everybody knows all about, what did he go and do? Why, he went 'way out yonder to the Devil's Icy Peak, summers, and married of a stranger and a furriner, and a heathen and a pagan, for aught he knew! and fetches of her home here to us!

That's what her daddy did! And now, what did her mammy do? Why, 'stead o' marrying of one of her own countrymen and kinsfolks, she ups and marries a 'Merican man as was a stranger and furriner to her; and a heathen and a pagan for aught that she knew."

"But they loved one another; there is no question of that," pleaded Miss Grandiere.

"What if they did? That's the contrariness of it, sez I! What call had either of 'em be 'a loving of strangers and furriners and a marrying of them, sez I? And now the gal has done just as her father and mother did before her! Turned her back on her own kith and kin, and took up 'long of a stranger and a furriner, and a heathen and a pagan, for aught she knows, sez I! It's in the blood, sez I! 'Trot sire, trot dam,' sez I! 'and the colt'll never pace,' sez I! And now, ladies, if you have thawed out and will take off your bonnets and things, I will put them away. But maybe you would rather go to a bedroom?"

"Yes," said Miss Grandiere, rising and going to a door on the side leading into an inner chamber.

"Oh! stop. Don't go in there, please, Miss Sukey, I—I have got a strange lady in there," hastily exclaimed their hostess.

"A strange lady!" repeated Miss Grandiere, in surprise.

"Yes—leastways a strange woman. I don't know about a lady; for if you're not acquainted with a person, sez I, you can't tell if they are ladies or no. But come upstairs and I will tell you about her, or leastways all I know about her. Lor', I sometimes s'picions as maybe she's Roland's mother!"

## CHAPTER XIX

### A STRANGE WOMAN

Miss Sibby opened a door in the corner near the fireplace and led her visitors up a steep and narrow flight of stairs to a small upper chamber in the roof, which was lighted by one dormer window, and furnished very simply with a bedstead, a chest of drawers, a washstand, and two cane chairs.

"Now, you see, I'm very sorry to have to fetch you up here, where there's no fire; but that strange woman, you know, when she come, of course I had to give up my room to her, and so you see how it is," said Miss Sibby, apologetically.

"Oh! never mind. We shall not stay up here long enough to get chilled; but who is the woman, anyhow?" inquired Mrs. Hedge.

"Well, she is a widdy woman, and her name is a Mrs. Wright, and she come from Callyfoundland."

"California, do you mean?"

"Yes; I s'pose that is it. I was thinking of Newfoundland, where Roland made his first voyage, and I got 'em mixed. It's impossible to memorize all the places, sez I. Well, about Mrs. Wright. She was a passenger on board the *Blue Bird;* and, naterally, Roland being third mate, got acquainted long of her, and she was bound for Port Tobacco, where she had business in the neighborhood concerning her late husband's affairs, and so she come down from Baltimore long o' Roland, and he fotch her here, and what could I do, sez I? I couldn't turn her out'n doors, could I? And she and Roland are that thick together as I sometimes s'picions mebbe as she's his own mother; for, you know, nobody knows who Roland's people are—a child which

was flung ashore by the sea when the *Carrier Pigeon* was wrecked."

"But if she was she would say so, wouldn't she?" inquired Mrs. Hedge.

"I don't know. I don't know. Sometimes I think I will ask her if she ever had a long-lost child. But, sez I, it's a delicate question, sez I, to ask of a strange woman, sez I. And so I think I'll wait and see how things will turn out. Anyhow, you'll see her at tea time, and Roland, too, and just you take notice!"

And so saying, Miss Sibby attended her guests—who had finished their toilets—downstairs.

A neat, old, colored woman was engaged in setting the table for tea.

"Put seven plates and seven cups and saucers, Mocka. I spects young Mr. Force will come in along of Master Roland," said Miss Sibby, as she once more seated herself among her guests around the fire.

Presently the inner door opened and a very fine-looking woman of about thirty-five years of age entered the room. She was a brilliant brunette, with a great quantity of rippling black hair covering a well-shaped head. Her features were, perhaps, rather coarse, her face and form rather too full, and her stature too low, but her eyes were large, black and beautiful, and shaded by long and very thick black lashes, and arched by heavy black brows; her mouth was large but well formed, plump and red, and her complexion was rich and beautiful beyond description. A strikingly handsome woman she would have been called anywhere. She wore a black silk dress, with fine lace ruffles at the throat and wrists; a pearl brooch and a very heavy gold watch chain.

She waddled into the room, with an easy, rolling motion, and nodded graciously to the company assembled there.

She looked doubtful, the sisters thought. She might be a lady, but—

As soon as she spoke all doubts were set at rest.

"Mrs. Wright, 'low me to introduce you to Mrs. Hedge, and to Miss Grandiere, also to little Miss Hedge," said the hostess, rising and formally presenting the stranger to her neighbors.

"Proud to know you, ma'am. Proud to know you, miss. Proud to know you, little miss. It is most seasonable weather for the season," said the stranger, bowing elaborately and smiling broadly on each of her new acquaintances—who all returned her greetings with quiet courtesy—and then seating herself in the armchair which had apparently been left vacant for her.

Both the sisters saw at once that the romance of Miss Sibby was not founded on fact, and that this woman could not have been the mother of the sea waif, Roland Bayard.

She chattered away incessantly about her voyage from San Francisco, her seasickness, the kindness of the young mate Bayard to her, and his great service in bringing her on to such a friendly house, and her intention to pay Miss Sibby very handsomely for the accommodation she had afforded her.

This latter clause, however, aroused Miss Sibby's ire. To talk of paying her! And in the presence of her genteel neighbors, too!

"No, ma'am!' exclaimed the old lady. "No, ma'am, you don't pay me nothing! Not if I know it, sez I! You're welkim, ma'am, sez I, to the very best in the house, as long as you choose to honor me with your company. But you don't pay for it! No, ma'am! No! Sybilla Bayard is poor enough, the Lord knows, sez I! And she has fallen far enough from her high estate, sez I! She who was descended from the great Duke of England; but she don't sell her hospitality, sez I! Not the descendant from the Duke of England don't, sez I!"

Poor Miss Sibby! Poor, simple old body! She was very much laughed at on account of her boasted ances-

tor, the "Duke of England." Yet her mistake was not so great as it seemed, for it was only the slight mistake of using the definite article "the" for the indefinite article "a," nor were her claims quite so ridiculous as they apeared to be, as will soon be proved.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am, I'm sure. I didn't mean no offense whatever! But—are you—descended from the Duke of England?" inquired the strange guest, opening her eyes wide with astonishment.

"I am," replied Miss Sibby, with great dignity. "And I'll prove it. My father was a Bayard, and his mother was a Barbar, and her great-great-grandfather was Henry Howard, third son of Thomas, Duke of England. These two ladies can testify to that, I reckon."

The stranger turned wondering eyes upon the two sisters.

Miss Grandiere answered by saying:

"Miss Bayard means a duke of England, and, as a mere matter of detail, the fourth Duke of Norfolk, one of whose younger sons came over in 1634 with the Calverts."

"Duke of Norfolk be hanged! Why, Norfolk is in this country, over yonder in Virginny somewhere, and we haven't got any dukes here! no, ma'am. My grandmother's great-grandfather was the son of the Duke of England!" persisted the old descendant of the Howards.

"But, my dear Miss Sibby, England is not a duchy!"

"Who said it was Dutchy! I know the Dutch come from Holland. I know something, if I am a poor, ignorant old 'oman, fallen from my high estate. And I know as I am descended from the Duke of England, and nobody shall take that prop from underneath of me! It has supported me in many a hard trial of life!"

"No, no one shall take it from you," said Miss Grandiere, yielding the point.

At this moment the door opened, admitting a fine, tall,

dark-eyed and dark-haired young man, with a bright, merry, mischievous countenance.

He bowed to the ladies, threw his sailor hat upon the floor, and went and kissed his Aunt Sibby, and then lifted Rosemary in his arms and kissed her. Finally he shook hands again all around.

"Glad to see you back, Roland!" said Miss Grandiere.

"Welcome home, my boy!" said Mrs. Hedge.

"Did you get me a card to the wedding?" inquired the Widow Wright.

"Yes—that is, Le Force got it for me. I could not have got it, you know. Here are three—one for you, one for auntie, and one for myself," said the young sailor, displaying the elegant cards of silver letters on white satin tablets.

"Then you are all going to the wedding?" said Mrs. Hedge.

"Yes, I reckon so now; though dear knows I didn't expect no invitation. But I reckon it was a kind thought of that young Le to send me one," said Miss Sibby.

"I think it very strange that the young man should be able to take the least interest in that wedding. I should think he would keep as far from the house and as far from the church as possible!" said Mrs. Hedge.

"Why, he is going to be groomsman!" put in young Bayard, laughing.

"No!" exclaimed in one breath all the women except Miss Grandiere, who quietly remarked:

"It is, probably, as I suspected. That childish engagement amounted to nothing. The childish affection faded from both hearts, and the young man was as well pleased to be off it as the young lady was."

"Yes, mebbe so, indeed. But where is Le this afternoon? I thought as he was coming home with you," inquired Miss Sibby.

"No; he couldn't. He had something else to do," replied Roland.

While they talked the one servant woman of Miss Sibby was coming and going between kitchen and parlor, bringing in dishes of fried chicken and fried ham, plates of hot biscuits and India cakes, plates of pickles, preserves, butter, cheese and all that goes to make up the edibles of a rustic tea table for company.

When the teapot was brought in, last of all, Miss Sibby went to the head of the board, and heartily invited the guests to be seated.

They accepted without delay. And were soon too busily engaged with their teacups to carry on the conversation about the wedding. Each one of the company present could have testified that not one of their number slighted the delicacies set before them by Miss Sibby.

When tea was over and it was growing dark, Mrs. Hedge and Miss Grandiere arose to take leave.

Mr. Roland Bayard insisted on seeing them safely through the woods of Oldfield.

So, when well wrapped up in their warm outer garments, they took leave of Miss Sibby and her guest, and set out for Oldfield, young Bayard gallantly escorting the two sisters on their walk, and the negro boy, Dan, leading the horse on which Rosemary rode.

They reached Oldfield in good time.

Young Bayard declined their invitation to enter, but promised to call soon, and so bade them good-night at the door.

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## CHAPTER XX

### THE WEDDING DAY

"Mother; Oh, mother! Give me something to help me to go through this day—something to stupefy—something to deaden me!"

It was Odalite's voice.

She had arisen from a sleepless bed, and come into her mother's room as soon as she had heard her father leave it.

She was, perhaps, the whitest, coldest, saddest bride that had ever seen a wedding morn.

Mrs. Force was standing before her dressing-glass, engaged in braiding her own bright hair. She turned and looked at her daughter again, with the often-recurring thought:

"Yes, yes, if it were not for her father's sake, I would rather dress my child for her burial than for this bridal."

She took the girl in her arms and kissed her, asking tenderly:

"What is it, dear?"

"Mother, I don't know. I dare not trust myself to go through with to-day's work. I have such strange, wild, mad risings in my heart, in my nerves, in my brain! I want something to overpower all this, and keep it down."

"My poor, poor darling! Oh, if I could suffer instead of you! Ah me! Must the innocent always suffer for the guilty?"

"You were never, never guilty, dear mother. And you also suffer. Ah! I see that you do. Don't grieve for me, mother, darling. Indeed, I am not—I am not——" She was about to add, "not unhappy," but truth arrested her words, and after a little pause she said: "I only want you to give me something to steady me. That is all." Then, seeing the anguish of the lady's face, she smiled wanly and added: "It will all be right, mother, dear. I know it will. I am trying to do my duty, and the Lord will not forsake me. It is only the—the wildness that comes over me. I want something to subdue it."

"Sit down, dear; sit down," said Elfrida Force, leading her daughter to the easy chair by the fire, and leaving her reclining there, while she herself went to her dressing-case and brought out that little vial of colorless

liquid, that looked as innocent as the purest spring water, and yet contained death to a dozen strong men, if administered.

"A teaspoonful of this would give her peace forever," whispered the tempter. And the woman shuddered, and nearly let fall the bottle. She recovered herself, dropped half a dozen drops on a lozenge, and brought it to her daughter, saying gently:

"This will quiet you, my dear."

Odalite took it with a smile and put it between her lips.

The door opened and Wynnette and Elva came in in their nightdresses.

They had "resigned" themselves "to the inevitable," especially as they saw that Le had ceased to grieve over it, and had even consented to be the groomsman, while they were to be the bridesmaids.

"I am sure, if Le don't mind it, we needn't," said Wynnette.

"And, oh, what beautiful dresses we have to wear!" added Elva.

Now they had burst into their mother's chamber, in all the excitement inspired by the occasion.

"We went into your room, Odalite, and as you were not there, we knew you must be here," said Elva, running and throwing her arms around her sister's neck.

"All right this morning, Odalite?" inquired Wynnette.

"Yes," quietly replied the girl, upon whom the powerful sedative was already beginning to act.

"My children, go and get ready for breakfast. It is ordered half an hour earlier this morning on account of the wedding. We must be at the church by eleven o'clock," said Mrs. Force.

The two little girls scuttled away to hurry on their home clothes to go down to the dining room.

Mrs. Force had finished dressing herself, and now

spoke to her daughter, who was still in her nightgown, reclining back in the chair.

"Odalite, you need not exert yourself to come down, dear. I will send you something up here. What shall it be?"

"Anything you like, mamma," languidly replied the girl.

The lady left the chamber and went down to the dining room, where she found all the family, with the exception of the bride-elect, assembled.

The bridegroom-expectant, who was still a member of the household, advanced politely, greeted his prospective mother-in-law and led her to her seat at the head of the table.

"Where is Odalite?" inquired Mr. Force, as he took his seat at the foot.

"I have left her in my apartment. She must not fatigue herself by making two toilets. I shall send her breakfast up," replied the lady.

"I hope she is quite well this morning?" said Col. Anglesea.

"Quite well," replied the lady.

And when she had served all her circle with coffee, tea, or cocoa, she called a servant to bring a waiter, and she prepared and sent up a dainty little repast to her daughter.

"The carriages will be at the door by ten o'clock, my dears, so you will please to be ready. It will take us full an hour to drive to All Faith. I hope the church will be well warmed," said the father of the family, as they all arose from the table.

"We will be ready in time," replied Mrs. Force, as they passed out of the dining room.

Leonidas Force looked so white and grim that little Elva paused behind the rest to speak to him.

"Le! Le! what's the matter? I do believe you do care, after all."

"Hush, Elva," said the youth, in a whisper.

"Le! if you do care, you can forbid the banns, on account of that engagement of yours. You can, indeed! Wynnette and I have been reading over the marriage service in the prayer book, and there is a place where it says, 'If any man here present can show cause'—— You know why it shouldn't be done, it wouldn't be done, and there an end! And I am sure you could show cause, Le!"

"Yes, dear; but I won't!" Le replied.

"Elva! If you don't stir your stumps—I mean hurry up—you won't be ready in time!" called Wynnette, from the bannister above.

Elva broke away, and ran upstairs.

And then began the toil of the toilets.

Every bedchamber was occupied as a dressing room.

Col. Anglesea, under the hands of his valet, was preparing himself in his own apartment.

Le, in his little den, was dressing unassisted.

Mr. Force, in a little closet adjoining his wife's room, was shaved and brushed and polished up by Jake, his "body servant."

Mrs. Force, with the assistance of her maid Luce, first dressed her daughter Odalite, and seating her on her large easy chair, left her while she dressed herself.

Miss Meeke, in the children's room, first made their toilets and then her own.

By half-past nine o'clock all the women of the family were assembled in the drawing room waiting for the gentlemen and the carriages.

The white, cold, still bride wore a trained dress of white velvet, made high in the neck and long in the sleeves, and trimmed with swansdown; a wreath of orange blossoms; a veil of white Spanish lace. A servant stood near her holding a large white fur cloak, with hood and muff, to be worn in the carriage.

The two little bridesmaids wore dresses of white cash-

mere, also made with high neck and long sleeves, and trimmed with white satin. They carried large white woolen wraps, to be worn in the carriage.

Mrs. Force wore a rich purple velvet dress, with a bonnet to match, and an India shawl.

Miss Meeke wore a dark brown silk, and brown velvet jacket and hat.

The gentlemen appeared, and the carriages were announced almost at the same moment.

"Have you had foot-warmers put in the ladies' coach?" inquired Mr. Force of the servant in attendance.

"Yes, sah, an' in all ob 'em," the man replied.

"Come, my dear," the father said, taking the white fur cloak from the waiting woman and wrapping it carefully around his daughter before leading her out.

Col. Anglesea gave his arm to Mrs. Force, and Le to Miss Meeke, while the two little girls followed arm in arm.

Three carriages were drawn up before the house.

The bride-elect, with her father and mother, occupied the first; the two young bridesmaids, with their governess, the second; and the bridegroom, with his groomsman, the third.

And in this order they left the house and took the road leading to All Faith Church.

It was a clear, cold, bright winter day. Their road went through bare woods, up and down rolling hills, and across frozen creeks.

In the foremost carriage Odalite sat wrapped, as to her person, in manifold white furs; as to her spirit, in a dreamy reverie.

"Are you cold, dear?" her father inquired, anxiously.

"No, papa."

"Are you not feeling well?"

"Oh, yes, papa."

"You are so very quiet," Mr. Force said.

"That is natural. Let us leave her to herself, dear," Mrs. Force murmured, in a low tone.

An hour's slow drive over difficult roads brought them near All Faith Church, an ancient edifice standing in a large grove.

As they approached they found the road on each side encumbered by a moving multitude, all going in one direction, and growing thicker the nearer they came to the church. These were driving, riding, or walking. There were carriages of every description of gentility or of shabbiness; there were horses and mules, donkey carts and ox carts, all crowded with eager spectators, and there were many foot passengers.

"Surely you never invited all these people?" said Mr. Force, in dismay.

"I have not invited more than thirty; and these all have cards; but people do not need invitations; there is nothing on earth to prevent them from coming here and crowding the roads and the churchyard," Mrs. Force explained.

At this moment some ill-advised person raised a cheer, and the multitude took it up and cheered the bridal procession until the welkin rang with their roaring.

"Hip! hip!! hurrah!!!"

In the midst of all this the three carriages entered the yard and drew up before the church.

The parties alighted.

The father took his daughter on his arm and led her into the building, which was well warmed.

There, in the vestibule, he relieved her of her fur cloak, while her two little sisters, who were close behind, let down her train and smoothed the folds of her dress.

The style of the little country church did not admit of much display of pageantry.

The altar and the walls were decorated with evergreens and holly. That was all.

Mr. Force led his daughter up the aisle, followed first by the two little bridesmaids, and next by the other members of the party without much regard to precedence.

The rector, in full canonicals, stood within the chancel.

The bridal train, formed before the altar, bowed to the rector, and knelt on the cushions.

The crowd, with which the church was filled, arose in mass and stretched their necks to get sight of the proceedings.

The rector opened the book, and began the well-known ritual:

"Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here, in the sight of God and in the face of this company, to join together this man and this woman in holy matrimony," and so forth.

When the minister concluded the exordium by the solemn warning:

"'If any man can show just cause why they may not lawfully be joined together, let him now speak.'"

In the pause that now followed Elva looked imploringly toward Le.

But Le kept silence, looking as grim as the Sphinx. Apparently he saw no just cause to interfere; nor, apparently, did any one else.

The ceremony went on to the question put to bridegroom and bride, and which was answered by the former with a firm, distinct—

"I will."

And the latter with a steady, quiet—

"I will."

"'Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?'" demanded the minister.

Mr. Force stepped forward, took the hand of his daughter and placed it within that of the bridegroom, almost shuddering with a vague presentiment of evil,

when he felt, even through her kid glove, how deadly cold and heavy that little hand was!

And the rites went on, and on, and on, and nothing happened to arrest them—no thunderbolt from heaven descended from the wintry sky to scatter the bridal party —no earthquake caused the ground to yawn and swallow them.

The rites went on, and on, and on, to their bitter end, where the voice of the officiating minister, assuming awful solemnity, oncludes the ceremony with these warning words:

" 'Those whom God hath joined together let not man put asunder.' "

"Yes!" shouted a voice, at which every one started, and the bridegroom grew pale. "Yes! That may be all very well as far as it goes! 'Whom God has joined together, let not man put asunder' by no manner of means whatever! But them as the devil has joined together a woman may put asunder, and she will, too, in double-quick time!"

This shocking interruption came from a short, stout, dark, but very handsome, and very well-dressed person, who, in great excitement, was elbowing and pushing her way up the center aisle toward the chancel at which the startled and affrighted bridal party stood.

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## CHAPTER XXI

### A ROUTED WEDDING PARTY

Words cannot depict the scene that ensued.

Blank amazement marked every face save one—that of the bridegroom, which was dark with wrath and hate.

For a minute no one moved or spoke.

Then two gentlemen found voice at once.

"Who are you, madam? And why do you come here in this unseemly manner to interrupt this service?" gravely inquired the officiating minister, addressing the stranger.

"What is the meaning of this outrageous conduct, Col. Anglesea? Who is this woman?" sternly demanded the bride's father of the bridegroom.

Every man, woman and child in the congregation arose, stretched their necks and leaned forward to hear and see what was going on.

"The woman is a lunatic escaped from some mad-house, I suppose. She had best be arrested. Where are your constables?" growled the bridegroom, drawing the arm of his bride within his own and attempting to leave the altar.

"Stop that man!" cried the strange woman. "If you care for that girl's honor and good name, stop that man!" she vehemently repeated, placing herself directly in the path of the enraged bridegroom and his half-stupefied bride.

"Begone, woman! You are mad! Will some one take this maniac in custody?" fiercely demanded Anglesea, roughly pushing the stranger aside, and dragging Odalite after him, and trying to force his way down the narrow aisle, which was now fast filling up with the eager, wondering people from the pews.

"One moment, if you please, sir. Let me relieve you of my daughter, until this interruption shall be explained," said Mr. Force, taking the hand of his child, to draw her away.

But the bridegroom's arm tightened around his prey, as he haughtily replied:

"Pardon me, sir! You have no authority over Mrs. Anglesea. She is my wife, and under my protection. Let me pass."

"Not if I know it—you don't pass here! Not with that innocent girl on your arm, you don't! Your wife,

is she? I see that, and go one better! And that's me! A man can't have two wives, can he, Mr. Parson? This ain't Utah, nor yet Salt Lake City, be it?"

"I think, Col. Anglesea," slowly began the rector—— but the bridegroom cut him short:

"Your interference is not required here, reverend sir. Your ministry is completed. The marriage ceremony is finished. I hold my wife on my arm."

"Then this is a Mormon settlement, and a man can marry as many wives as he pleases, eh, gentlemen?" inquired the strange woman, looking around.

"Good friends! Pray let us pass!" the colonel expostulated, trying to elbow his way through the excited crowd that filled up the aisle, and seemed to wait with suspended breath the issue of the scene.

Two voices answered at once:

"No, sir. I think not. Mr. Force has asked for his daughter until this matter can be investigated," said Thomas Grandiere.

"Will you release the lady, at her father's demand, and save us the discredit of using violence in this sacred place?" inquired William Elk.

"Oh, my Lord, there'll be a fight!" exclaimed a voice from the crowd.

"Will some one be kind enough to take this mad woman in custody?" exclaimed Anglesea, beside himself with fear, shame and wrath.

"In custody, is it? If anybody is taken in custody, it is that man there! Yes, it is you I am talking about! It's you, for bigamy! I wish I had got a warrant out and fetched a couple of bailiffs to do it, too! Why don't you let this girl go? You might's well do it first as last. You'll have to do it, you know!" said the woman.

"Will you give me my daughter, Col. Anglesea?" quietly questioned Abel Force.

"No, I will not give you my wife!" fiercely retorted the bridegroom.

But at this moment the two sturdy Maryland farmers came up on either side of the man, and, each taking a firm grip of his arms, with gentle strength, released the half-swooning bride, who immediately dropped upon the bosom of her father.

"I shall hold every man here to a strict account for this outrage!" fiercely hissed the furious bridegroom.

"Quite right, sir! We will be at your service at any time," said William Elk.

Abel Force bore his unfortunate daughter off to the side pews, where her mother, her sisters and her governess had retreated, and where they sat, confounded and overwhelmed by all that had passed.

"Take her, Elfrida," he said, lifting the girl and laying her in the arms of her mother. "And do not allow that man to come near her. He has behaved badly in not giving her up, on my demand, until we can inquire into this matter. It may be that this strange woman is a lunatic, or an impostor. We shall see."

Mrs. Force made no reply. She could not speak. She took her daughter on her lap, as if Odalite had been a young child, and laid the pale cheek of the girl on her bosom, and motioned her husband to return to the group around the bridegroom.

"Odalite, darling, do not grieve. No wrong of any sort shall be done you. You have your father and your mother, dear, and our faithful love shall never leave you," said Abel Force, as he stooped and kissed his daughter's pale forehead, and walked away.

But Odalite made no sign.

"And you have us, darling, darling sister," said Elva, taking up and kissing one cold hand.

"And you have Le, as true as steel!" put in Wynnette.

"And, oh, I knew! I knew something was going to happen to stop it all! I didn't know whether it was going to be a forbidding of the banns, or an apoplectic

fit, or an earthquake, but I knew something would happen," said Elva, taking the bride's other hand.

"'Some outlet through thunder and lightning,'" added Wynnette.

"Oh, why don't you speak? Why don't you say something, Odalite?" inquired Elva.

But Odalite gave no sign. She seemed stupefied, benumbed.

"Let your sister alone, my dears. Don't disturb her," said Miss Meeke.

Elfrida Force said nothing. She only recognized in this lethargy the merciful effects of the drug she had administered to her suffering daughter that morning.

Meanwhile, the scene before the chancel was becoming more exciting.

Col. Anglesea, furious, defiant, aggressive, but held in check by the surroundings; Abel Force, deeply offended, but self-controlled and dignified; Thomas Grandiere, dark, gloomy and determined; William Elk, red, fiery and threatening; and the strange woman composed, sarcastic and triumphant—formed a group around which the crowd assembled in the church were pressing as closely as possible.

"How dared you come here to make this scene?" fiercely demanded Anglesea.

"How 'dared' I? Humph! I like that! Do you think Im afeared of *you?* When I have got the whip hand of you, too? I came here to take a hand in this here little game o' your'n! And I guess it's my deal now! And I raythe guess as how I shall turn up the little joker! We'll see presently!" laughed the woman.

Then, turning to the others, she said:

"Gentlemen, I came here this morning not to make a muss, but to prevent that roaring lion there—who is always going about the world seeking whom he may devour—from gobbling up that innocent lamb of a young girl; and I mean to stay here until I *do* prevent it. Yes!

I'm talking about *you,* you beast!" she exclaimed, suddenly turning upon Anglesea. "And you better not show your ugly mug down in Wild Cats' Gulch, if you don't want to be stood on your head and druv down into the ground like a post, and buried alive! The boys are piping hot after you, they are, I tell you! It was them that put up a pile to send me on here after you!"

The woman was handsome, but short and stout, and, like *Hamlet,* "scant o' breath." She had talked herself out of wind for the moment.

Anglesea seized the opportunity, controlled his temper by an effort, turned to the gentlemen near him, and said:

"Friends, if that woman can be kept quite for five minutes, I will answer, to the satisfaction of all here present—though I consider it an outrage that I should be compelled to answer one who ought rather to be arrested and sent off to prison for a most flagrant breach of the peace! Still, if she can keep quiet, I will do so."

"All right, old rooster!" laughed the woman. "It is your play now, and I give you your turn! Down with your best card!"

"Neighbors," continued Col. Anglesea, fully controlling himself, and falling into that confidential tone which he had always found so effectual—"neighbors, I call upon you, in common justice to me, to use your reason and judgment in this matter. You see this woman who has brought forward this most absurd, preposterous, and, I must say, humiliating claim to be my wife. For it is most humiliating, indeed, that any of you should have the faintest shadow of a suspicion that she may be telling the truth. Why, gentlemen, I am from England. She says she is from California. I never was in California in all the days of my life. I never set eyes on this woman before this hour. She is no more my wife than she is the empress of India. I call upon you to look at her, and ask yourselves if it is at all likely or possible

that she could, under any circumstances, be—what she claims to be. You see her appearance; you see her conduct; you hear her speech; is it likely—is it possible—that I could have married such a person? You see the absurdity of the thing. No, gentlemen; this person is a lunatic, laboring under some fantastic hallucination, or she is an impostor, conspiring, with others, to blackmail me. I demand, in the name of justice, that she be arrested and sent to prison for her flagrant breach of the peace in her outrageous assault upon me this morning."

The colonel, who had completely mastered his emotions, spoke with such candor, judgment and authority that the men present whispered together, and seemed almost inclined to think that they had committed a shameful indiscretion in suspecting so gallant an officer and so perfect a gentleman of any impropriety, on the mere word of a strange woman, who was certainly not a lady.

The stranger saw the tide of sentiment, or of opinion, turning, and her black eyes sparkled, her blooming cheeks glowed and her red lips wreathed in a mocking smile, as she said:

"I declare! If you haven't played the right bower! And you have very nearly took the trick, only for my little joker Here it is, gentlemen! See me take this trick! Here! Here's the joker!"

And, with these words, she took a folded parchment from her pocket, and handed it to the rector.

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## CHAPTER XXII

### THE LITTLE JOKER

"WHAT are these?" demanded the reverend gentleman, unfolding the parchment.

"Oh, it's only my little joker, that took his right bower and won the trick," laughed the woman.

"I don't understand," said the rector, while Abel Force, Thomas Grandiere and William Elk drew near and looked over his shoulders at the document.

"Well, read it, and then maybe you will understand. Don't you see it is the marriage certificate?" demanded the woman.

"It is, indeed," said the rector, examining the document. "It is, indeed, a certificate of the marriage of Angus Anglesea, colonel in the Honorable East India service, Anglewood Manor, Lancashire, England, and Ann Maria Wright, widow, of Wild Cats' Gulch, California, signed by the officiating minister, Paul Minitree, pastor of St. Sebastian's Parish, Sebastian, California, and witnessed by Henry Powers, Margaret Rayburn and Philomena Schubert! It is dated August 1, 18—. Col. Anglesea, what explanation can you give of this?" sternly demanded the rector, while the severe faces of the other men emphasized the question.

"Why, he can't give any! The joker takes every trick! It's the highest card in the pack, and I have just played it!"

"The thing is a forgery! I never was in California in my life! And I never set eyes on this woman before this hour! It is a forgery, I say!" exclaimed the colonel, so positively, so confidently, so authoritatively that the men were once more puzzled.

"Oh, it's a misdeal, then, is it? I'll prove that it isn't!" said the stranger. "Now, then, gentlemen, you can test the truth for yourselves. Money is no object to you, particularly in such a case as this. You can telegraph to the Rev. Father Paul Minitree, and ask him if this marriage certificate is genuine, and you can telegraph every word of the certificate, word for word. Ask him to compare it with the entry in the parish register of August 1, 18—, and to telegraph the answer, at your expense, mind you; and, though it will be expensive, it

will be worth the money, and you won't mind the cost," said the woman.

This settled the question.

Abel Force, the man most deeply concerned of any man present, had made no violent demonstration. He had controlled his just wrath all through the scene. His reverence for the sanctuary had aided his habitual self-government in this ordeal.

Now, turning his back on Col. Anglesea, he said to Leonidas, who had been a silent spectator of the drama enacting around him:

"Go, my dear boy, and order the carriages. I shall take my wife and daughters home."

Le nodded, and went elbowing his way through the crowd—that made room for him—to do his errand.

"Col. Anglesea, we will hereafter be compelled to dispense with your society at Mondreer. Your effects shall be sent to the Calvert Hotel, subject to your orders," he said, turning for a moment to his late guest.

"Sir, you abduct my wife by violence! You do it at your own peril!" exclaimed the braggart.

The Maryland gentleman bowed gravely, but deigned no reply in words.

"Madam," he said, turning to the stranger, "if you will accept a seat in our carriage, and give us the privilege of your company at our house, Mrs. Force and myself would like to talk further with you on this subject."

"Oh, yes, thanky'! That I will! For I have got lots and loads to tell you about that grand vilyun! You needn't think I came here to stop the marriage because I cared for him! Not I! I'm that sick of the beast that the very sight of him is tartar emetic! What i' the name o' sense ever come over a purty gal like your daughter to take up with a man like him? And a man older and uglier than her own father? Good land! I didn't mean to say that! I beg your pardon, sir; I didn't indeed! I meant to say a man not nearly so young and

handsome as her own father! That was it!" exclaimed the stranger.

Mr. Force bowed his acknowledgment of her apology, and then led her up to the pew occupied by his wife and daughters, and introduced her as follows:

"Mrs. Col. Angus Anglesea, my dear. Mrs. Anglesea, my wife, Mrs. Force; our eldest daughter, Miss Force; our younger daughters, Misses Wynnette and Elva; our friend, Miss Meeke."

When rather embarrassed bows and courtesies were exchanged, Mr. Force added:

"Mrs. Anglesea has been so kind as to accept an invitation to return home with us."

"Yes," put in the lady referred to. "Yes, your old man asked me, and I accepted, because I have got such loads and loads and loads to tell you about that grand vilyun. Didn't he come nigh doing for that lamb? Never mind, honey"—this to the half-conscious Odalite —"I know it seems hard for you, 'specially if you was fond of him—though why you should 'a' been—Lord! Anyhow, bad as it is now, it would 'a' been a heap worse if he'd 'a' married you and then you'd found out as he had another wife a-living."

Odalite took no notice of this speech. Wynnette answered:

"Oh, you needn't fret your nerves to fiddle strings about that—I mean you need not distress yourself, ma'am. She hates him, and so do I. And so does Elva. In spite of prayer book and catechism, we hate him. We can't help it."

"Eh? What's that you say?" inquired Mrs. Anglesea. "You hate him? Then why, in the name o' common sense, did she want to marry, and you all let her, for?"

"It was Old Scratch's doings—I mean it was Satanic agency," Wynnette explained.

At this moment Leonidas Force came up, and said to his cousin:

"The carriages are ready sir. I spoke to the rector, sir, and, with his leave, had them brought around to the vestry door, so that you can all go out that way, and avoid the crowd."

"Thank you, Le. Dear, kind fellow! It was very good and thoughtful of you. Come, love. Come, children. Le, give your arm to this lady. Mrs. Anglesea, let me introduce my relative, Mr. Leonidas Force."

"Oh, Lord! I know the fellow. Knew him before I knew you," said the woman, very unceremoniously appropriating Le's arm.

Mr. and Mrs. Force led the way, supporting their drooping daughter between them.

Le followed with the California lady.

And Miss Meeke and the two little girls brought up the rear.

They passed through the chancel into the vestry, where they found the rector had preceded them, to wait and offer such sympathetic condolence as he might.

"What do you think of this baseness, reverend sir?" inquired Mr. Force.

"It may be premature to judge before all the evidence is in, but it seems as if your late guest is an impostor, if not a criminal."

"I feel sure that there can be no doubt upon that subject."

"If I can be of any service, pray command me at any time," said the rector.

"I thank you very much. I think I will have to trouble you with two commissions. First, to tell our friends in there that, under existing circumstances, there can be no reception at our house to-day."

"I will do so."

"And, also, I must ask you to telegraph to St. Sebastian, as the woman advised, for further proof of her

claim. Here is my pocketbook. Don't spare it in the cause. Could you spare an hour or two to come up to my house to-morrow?" inquired Mr. Force.

"I will take the time, and make it a point to be there."

"Come to dinner, if you please, sir. You know our hour," said Mrs. Force.

"Thank you, madam," replied the minister, without further committing himself.

Then the party took leave of their pastor, and went out by the back door to enter their carriage.

Abel Force handed his wife, his eldest daughter and their guest into the first carriage, which he entered after them, the party of four filling the interior.

Le handed Miss Meeke and his two young cousins into the second carriage, and followed them.

And the little procession left the churchyard, and took their way through the grove to the turnpike road leading to Mondreer.

Meanwhile, the whole congregation of wedding guests lingered in the church, and gathered into groups to talk over the strange events that had just happened before their eyes.

They were not disappointed, those wedding guests. Far from that. They had got so much more than they expected! They had not only seen the bride, the bridegroom, the bridesmaids, the bride's mother, and all their dresses, which had been made in New York, after the latest fashion; they had not only seen the whole marriage ceremony performed, and noted the demeanor of every one concerned in it, from the rector who read the rites to the smallest bridesmaid who held the glove; they had not only seen all these pageantries which they had expected to see, but they had seen a great deal more than they had bargained for. They had witnessed the performance of a startling drama in real life—the arrest of a marriage by the sudden appearance of the would-be bridegroom's wife.

Now, they had got a great deal more than they had looked for, besides having something to talk about all the rest of their lives.

They could not leave the church, though the dinner hour was at hand, and most of them had far to go to reach their own homes.

They collected in little crowds to discuss the interruption.

"Who was the woman, did anybody know? When did she come to the neighborhood? Had any one seen or heard of her before to-day?"

Such questions as these went around.

At last some one said that the stranger had been staying at Miss Sibby Bayard's for the last week.

And immediately Miss Sibby Bayard became the center of attraction and the most important person in the assembly.

The people crowded around her, plied her with a score of questions before she could answer one.

"Yes!" she exclaimed, at last, impatiently. "Yes! She has been staying at my house for five days past. She came from Califoundery, passenger in the ship where Roland was third mate. Yes! The boy fetched her to me, 'cause she had business in this neighborhood."

"Did you know the nature of her business?" asked the fiery, red-headed, hot-tempered, little William Elk.

"Never dreamed of her doing this here. Thought she was a widdy woman. Thought her business was money. Why, I fetched her to church this morning myself, without a notion that she wanted to come here for anything but just to see the wedding. And she was awful anxious to get here before the ceremony was begun."

"It is a great pity that you did not arrive before it was finished," said the tall, dark, gloomy Thomas Grandiere.

"So it were. I can't gainsay that. And so we should 'a' been here if it hadn't been for the stubborn nater of that mule o' mine; for, you see, I had no other convey-

ance, and had to drive my wisitor here in the cart. And, if ever Old Scratch got into a brute beast, he got into that mule this morning. Couldn't get him out of a creep to save my life! And he balked so, coming up Indian Creek Hill, that I thought he would have upset us into the water—and it froze over! So we didn't get here till after the ceremony was over. There, that is all I know about it! Miss Hedge and Miss Sukey Grandiere spent an afternoon and took tea at my house, along with her, and maybe they can tell you something," said the old lady.

And immediately she was deserted in favor of the sisters, who became, in their turn, the center of interest.

But these ladies had really very little to communicate.

Then the curiosity of the crowd took another direction.

"We were all invited to the wedding reception, but, of course, we are not expected to go now," said Mrs. Hedge.

"But it might seem like an offense if we didn't," suggested Miss Grandiere.

And people were divided on the subject until the rector appeared, requested a hearing, and, with the apologies and regrets of Mr. and Mrs. Force, announced that there could be no reception held at Mondreer that day.

So, at length, the congregation reluctantly separated and went home.

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## CHAPTER XXIII

### MRS. ANGLESEA'S VISIT

It was late in the winter afternoon when Mr. and Mrs. Force, with their family and guest, reached Mondreer.

They were met by attentive servants, who were eager to behold the returning bride and bridegroom, and

looked astonished to see the bride return in charge of her parents, accompanied by a strange woman.

"Where was the bridegroom?" was the question that their amazed faces put, though their tongues said nothing.

An accident must have happened. His horses must have run away and upset the carriage. Maybe he might be brought home on a stretcher presently. They curbed their curiosity until they could interview the coachman, who must know all about it.

They waited on the returning party in respectful silence.

"Miss Meeke, my dear," said Mrs. Force, as they entered the hall, "will you oblige me and take charge of our guest, and show her into the best spare room, where there is a fire, and attend to her comfort? Take Wynnette with you. You see, dear, that I have to give my whole care to my poor child here. Mrs. Anglesea, I am sure you will excuse me for a little while?"

"Oh, go along with you and look after the gal! She's 'most dead! How she can take on so after that beat beats me! Lord! there's no accounting for gals' whims! But there! go along with her. Never mind me; I can make myself at home anywheres!" exclaimed the visitor, beginning to pull off her overshoes then and there.

Miss Meeke and Wynnette invited and conducted her upstairs to the best bedchamber, situated in front of the house, with windows overlooking the bay; furnished with maple wood and blue chintz, and warmed by a fine, open, wood fire.

Wynnette drew an armchair to the fire, and made the panting guest sit down in it, while Miss Meeke looked to the washstand, to see if there were water and towels enough.

"I have to get one of you young ones to lend me the loan of a hair brush and comb, for I didn't bring any. If I had knowed I was coming, I'd 'a' done it. But,

Lord! no one ever knows! And there! I have just remembered as I never took leave of that good soul, Miss Sibby! And whatever will she think of me, a-going off at a tangent in this onthankful manner?" meandered the woman, talking partly to her attendants and partly to herself.

"Oh, she will say you were so flambergasted by the rumpus—I mean confused and excited by the occasion—that you forgot to bid her good-by," said Wynnette.

"You will find new combs and hair brushes, and everything else you will require, on the dressing table, or on the washstand," Miss Meeke explained.

While the governess and her pupil were doing all they could to make the stranger guest comfortable in the spare room, Mrs. Force, assisted by her woman, Luce, and followed by Elva, supported her helpless daughter up to Odalite's own room, where they undressed and put her to bed.

Odalite soon fell into a deep sleep.

Her mother sat down by her bed to watch, and told Elva to go downstairs and help to entertain their guest; and told Luce to leave the room, but to remain within call.

When the lady was left alone with her sleeping child, and had time to collect her thoughts, she was divided between a sense of relief in her daughter's unexpected rescue from the martyrdom of an abhorrent marriage, and terror as to what the archenemy and artful plotter might do next.

Would he pocket his shame and go back to his own land?

Would he linger in the neighborhood, stubborn, defiant and aggressive, as he had shown himself in the church?

Above all, would he attempt to see her again, to get any other advantage over her from the power he possessed in the knowledge of her secret?

He could not insist on any marital rights over Odalite —that was quite certain now.

Would he demand money as the price of his silence? If so, he should have all the money she could command of her own by the sale of her jewels, laces and India shawls, on condition that he should leave the country.

And still her thoughts reverted to the great relief that she felt in the fact that he could no longer persecute Odalite. The proof of his former marriage in the substantial presence of his living wife forbade that.

This latter suggested another question:

What under heaven could have caused Angus Anglesea—certainly a gentleman by birth and position; certainly a man of cultivated mind, fastidious tastes and of refined manners, except when evil passions got the mastery and turned him, for the time, into a ruffian—what could have induced such a man to marry such a woman as she who claimed to be his wife?

In the midst of these speculations, the door opened silently, and Abel Force entered the room on tiptoes, and silently signaled his wife to come and speak to him.

She arose and went to meet him.

"How is Odalite?"

"She is sound asleep—so sound that you need not fear to wake her," replied the lady.

"But, is that sleep well? She was very lethargic in the church, I noticed. Had I not better send for a physician?"

"No, no, certainly not. Her sleep is well. It is the effect of an opiate I gave her. The best treatment under the circumstances. Do not feel the least anxious as to present or future consequences of this day's events. Believe me, our child will never break her heart for the loss of that unmasked villain."

"And yet he was a friend of yours, Elfrida?"

"Never! I told you so from the beginning of your acquaintance with him. I explained that he was my

brother's friend, and that they were brother officers in the Indian campaign. I distinctly assured you that he was not my friend."

"Ah, I remember! Then it was his manner that misled me. Well, he is gone. Let him go. I hope he will soon take his departure for his own country. Great Heaven! Suppose the criminal marriage had been consummated before the discovery of the living wife had been made! Elfrida, I should have killed that man! Oh, my dear, it is not only the murderers who are criminally capable of murder!"

"Do not talk so, Abel. The temptation was saved you."

"By a hair's breadth only. It was a narrow escape!"

"Oh, no! The woman, I hear, had been in the neighborhood for a week past, watching him, no doubt."

"Then, why in the name of decency did she not make herself and her claims known to us sooner, and here, at the house?"

"I do not know, unless she wished to put him to a public shame. She says she has a great deal to tell us; perhaps she will tell us that."

"I shall ask for an explanation of that, at least. Well, my dear, I will leave you with our child. You will come down as soon as you can."

"I will join you at dinner," said the lady.

And, as her husband left the room, she went and resumed her seat by her daughter's bedside.

Wynnette and Elva, who had not at all changed their pretty bridesmaids' dresses of cream-white cashmere trimmed with satin, were seated at the piano in the drawing room, playing a duet for the entertainment of Mrs. Anglesea, who sat in a big, blue velvet rocker, and applauded whenever the music pleased her.

Miss Meeke had taken temporary charge of household affairs, and was out advising the servants.

The truth about the absence of the bridegroom had to

be told some time or other, and so she told them then and there of the interrupted wedding, and of the identity of their new guest as the lawful wife of Col. Anglesea.

Though the faithful negroes were full of wrath against the impostor, and would have liked to hang him on a tree until dead, yet, upon the whole, they were glad of what had happened. They had never liked "the furriner," as they called Col. Anglesea, and they felt secretly delighted that he was not to marry their young mistress, to take her away to "furrin" parts.

"To go to want to marry our young mistress, and he wid anoder wife libin'! Oh, de wickedness ob mankind! But it is a habit dey gibs deirselves, child'en! 'Deed it is! Nuffin' 'tall but a habit dey gibs deirselves!" said Aunt Lucy, dogmatically.

"But 'bout de deception, miss?" inquired the cook.

"There will be no reception. The minister was requested to announce from the chancel that there could be none," replied the young lady.

"Lor'! Lor'! Lor'! An' all dem good t'ings to eat goin' to waste!" deplored the cook.

"They need not. Cakes and sweetmeats and candies will keep until they are consumed."

"Yes, miss; but de chickun sallit, an' de bone turkey, an' de pattydy four craws, dey won't keep till to-morrow, not even on ice."

"I suppose, then, that what cannot be consumed to-day must be lost. I see no remedy."

"An' whey we gwine to set de dinner table, w'en de dinin' room is all took up long ob de weddin' feas' spread out on dat yonder stension table? We ain't got time to take all de fings offen dat!"

"No, indeed, you have not. You had better lock up the dining room, just as it stands, to wait your mistress' orders, and set the table in the sitting room."

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE FORSAKEN WIFE'S STORY

HAVING given her last instructions, Miss Meeke returned to the drawing room, where she found the new guest, extended at length on the blue, velvet sofa, with her chubby hands clasped under her head on one end and her stoutly booted feet elevated on the other. She was fast asleep and snoring sonorously.

Wynnette and Elva were standing gazing on her, with their faces full of guilty fear.

"What is the matter here?" inquired the governess.

"Oh, Miss Meeke," exclaimed Wynnette, "I'm afraid she's half seas over! I mean—I mean——"

"Elva, do you tell me what is all this—if you know," said the governess, seeing that Wynnette had broken down in her attempt to explain.

"Oh, Miss Meeke," said Elva, taking up the thread of the discourse, "when we finished playing the duet, she there on the sofa asked for a glass of wine, and Wynnette and I went ourselves to get it for her, and we went into the dining room, where the beautiful wedding table is set out and all the wines in cut-glass decanters on the sideboard. And—and—I am afraid—I know—we made a mistake and poured out a claret glass full of cognac brandy and brought it to her."

"And did she drink it?"

"Every drop! And she said it was proof brandy, and worth a bottle of common stuff! And then she talked a good deal, and then she lay down on the sofa, and went to sleep."

"I am very sorry. My dears, you should never meddle with the decanters. You should have called Jacob, who would have known what to bring."

"But Jake was not in reach. He was away down in

the stable yard, talking to a crowd of grooms and other men and boys. I saw him through the back windows, and I knew he was telling them all about what happened in the church. Oh, Miss Meeke, do you think she will die? Oh, just hear how she snores! Will she wake up in fits?" cried Elva, in fright.

"No, my dear," said the governess, looking attentively upon the woman. "No; don't be alarmed. I think her condition is as much the effect of reaction from fatigue and excitement as of the brandy. Besides, she is wearing a tight dress, and lying in a cramped position, all of which obstructs her breathing. We must wake her up."

But at this moment Mr. Force and Leonidas came in, talking eagerly, and their abrupt entrance startled the woman out of her slumber. She sat up, rubbed her eyes, yawned loudly, asked where she was, and expressed a suspicion that she had been asleep.

Wynnette gave her Mrs. Force's bottle of sal ammonia that stood, by chance, on the sofa table.

Elva ran out and brought a glass of ice water.

She sniffed the salts strongly, with an:

"Ah! Ah-h! That's the sort!"

She drank the water audibly, and handed back the goblet, with a loudly drawn breath and an:

"Ah! Ah-h! Lord, Lord, what a day this has been!"

"I hope you have rested, ma'am," said Mr. Force, politely.

"Oh, yes; I'm all right now, thanky'! Where's your old 'oman and the gal? I hope they have taken no harm from that there rumpus?"

"None whatever. Mrs. Force will be down in a few moments."

The lady entered the room while he was speaking.

She still wore the rich purple velvet dress that she had put on for the wedding. In fact, no one had made any change in their costumes, except to lay off bonnets, wraps and gloves.

Dinner was now announced.

Mr. Force gave the stranger his arm, and led the way to the dining room, followed by the other members of the party.

As the dinner went on, each member of the family felt more and more wonder that Col. Anglesea should ever have thought of marrying the woman who claimed him. Handsome, good-humored and sensible she certainly was; but—she talked and laughed loudly, called the master and mistress of the house the old man and the old 'oman; loudly praised the dishes she preferred, asking to be helped to them three or four times; ate with her knife, dipping the same knife into the saltcellar or the butter dish; and, indeed, she shocked good taste in many ways.

How, indeed, could Angus Anglesea ever have married such a woman?

It was not until after tea, when the family party were assembled in the drawing room, and Mrs. Force had sent away the two litle girls, in charge of their governess, that the story of that marriage was told.

There were present Mr. and Mrs. Force, Leonidas and Mrs. Anglesea.

They were gathered around the open grate, where a glowing fire of sea coal burned.

"Yes," said the woman, putting her feet upon the low, brass fender and drawing up the edge of her dress, to toast her ankles, "this is just as good a time to tell you all about it as any other, now that the young uns are gone to roost. I hate to talk about the wickedness of the world before the young uns; they will find it out quick enough for themselves, poor things! Well, you want to know what in the name o' sense ever possessed me to marry that beat, don't you?" she inquired of Mrs. Force.

It was not exactly the way in which the lady had put

the question of the marriage to herself, but she bowed her head in assent.

"Well, then, my late husband, Zeb Wright, made a big fortune in the mines. Him and me was one of the very first that went out to the diggings. And he made his big pile by real hard hand work—and by none o' your blasting and crushing and lifting machines and things.

"And the year he died he had put away a hundred and twenty-three thousand, four hundred and fifty dollars in the Californy Miners' Saving Bank.

"And we might 'a' retired on that, but we was still in the prime o' life, nyther of us forty years old then—and I'm not now—and so he said we could go on for another ten year and make another hundred thousand, and then go back to the East and live offen it in grand style.

"But, Lord! who can tell what a day may bring forth, let alone ten year? One autumn day he came home to me, in our shanty at Wild Cats' Gulch, with a hard chill, and in two hours, just as the turn of the cold fit into the hot one, he had a little spasm and went right off.

"Well, I was all alone, having of no child'en. But the boys they was very good to me, and seen to the funeral and all that. And, after it was all over, I stayed on in the shanty, partly because I hated to leave it, and partly because the equinoctial storms had ris' the rivers and carried away the bridges, and made the travel between Wild Cats and St. Sebastian awful hard and risky.

"In that first year of my widdyhood, I had a heap of offers from one and another of the boys, for there wa'n't many wimmin there; but I snubbed 'em all.

"It wasn't till the next summer that I went to St. Sebastian to see about drawing out my money, or a part of it, to go East.

"Well, there at the Hidalgo Inn, I met with Col. Anglesea, and sorter got acquainted long of him. He had been out on the plains with a lot of English officers,

a-hunting of the buffalo, or pretending to do it, and now he was on his way home, so he said—gwine to sail from 'Frisco to York, and then to Liverpool. He said as he had inwested half a million o' money in Californy. Lord sakes, how that man lied!

"Then, like a plagued fool as I was, with nobody to advise me—don't tell me about wimmen having any sense! They always get coaxed, or swindled, or scared out o' their money!—I goes and tells that blamed beat and cheat about my hundred and twenty-three thousand four hundred and fifty dollars, and asks his opinion how I ought to inwest it.

"And he tells me cock-and-bull stories about companies, and shares, and per cents. and things that I knew nothing about. And he wanted me to give him the money to inwest for me, and save me the trouble and 'noyance.

"But I wasn't quite such a donkey as that, nyther! I just wouldn't trust him with a dollar! No more would I sign any paper that he brought me. No, not one! Yet I did like the insiniwating creetur' to such an extent, even then, that I couldn't bear to hurt his feelings by seeming to distrust him, and so I always made some excuse for not doing what he recommended.

"After that he changed his course and began to make love to me! Lord, how that man could make love! Ask that gal of your'n! I reckon she could tell you!

"Well, I don't know how it was to this day! I must 'a' been bewitched! But I was such a cornsarned fool that I went and married him! And two weeks after that he levanted, with all my money! Leastways, all to a trifle of about twenty dollars, which I had about me in my room, and which just was enough to take me back to Wild Cats' Gulch. And, if ever you did see a chopfallen cuss going home, that was me! The hotel people had even kept my boxes for my board!

"Oh, but the boys was mad when they heard all about

it! They was 'most as mad with me for being such a fool as they was with him for robbing me. But they put me up to following of him, telling me if any one could run a man to earth, it would be an injured woman. And they put up a pile for me, and took my boxes out of quod, at the Hidalgo, and started me on my way to 'Frisco, for I knowed he had made for that port.

"And there I found out he had sailed in the *Eglea* for New Orleans, and I took the first steamer to that port. There I learned that he had stopped at the St. Charles Hotel for a few days, and had then gone to Savannah. Lord, what a chase I had! From Savannah to Mobile; from Mobile to Havana; from Havana back to St. Francisco. And there I heard that he had sailed for Baltimore!

"Well, I took passage on the *Blue Bird,* bound for Baltimore. There I made the acquaintance of young Roland Bayard, the third mate, who was very good to me. Well, we got to be such good friends that at last, one day, I up and told him all my troubles. And when he heard the name of my rascally husband:

"'Anglesea,' says he—'Angus Anglesea!' says he. 'Why, that's the man who is staying with a neighbor of ours down in Maryland. My old aunt wrote to me about him in the very last letter, which met me at 'Frisco.'

"And he took the letter out of his pocket and gave it to me to read, and, sure as a gun, it was my fine colonel as the old aunty was writing about! And I said to the young man as I must have been put on a false scent to be running about among Southern ports, when he had gone North. And he said there was no doubt in the world that the man himself had put me on the false scent.

"Whether or no that was so, I thought it was very providential I had fell in long o' this young mate, and we got to be fast friends. And we laid a plot that we

should say nothing about it, and he would take me to his aunty's, and I should go by the name of my first husband, Wright, and lay low and say nothing, for fear my colonel should find me out and run away again before I could nab him.

"Well, we reached Baltimore early in this month, you know, and young Bayard got leave and came home, fetching me along of him. And the fust news as we heard when we got here was as my fine gentleman was gwine to be married to a fine heiress.

"But Roland and I, we winked at each other, and never let on to a single soul as I was the colonel's lawful wife. We thought we'd just have lots of fun out of the game, anyways, and wait till the wedding day, when all the people should be in the church, and then—in the midst of his triumph—pull him down and disgrace him before all the world.

"Lord, we didn't mean to wait for the last minnit, when the ceremony was over, but to stop it at the very beginning, where the parson asks, 'if any one knows just cause,' you know. But that consarned beast of an old mule of Miss Sibby's wouldn't make time. There, that's all!"

At this moment a note was brought in and handed to Mrs. Force.

She opened it, and read:

"Notwithstanding all seeming proof, I solemnly swear to you that I never was married to the woman Wright; that I was free to contract matrimony when I married your daughter, and that she is my lawful wife. I must see you alone, when I will prove this to your satisfaction.

A. A."

## CHAPTER XXV

### THE GUEST SHOCKS HER HOST

Mrs. Force turned pale as death while she read the note. When she finished it, she stooped forward and dropped it into the red heart of the coal fire.

Then, averting her head, that no one might see the blanching of her face, she said, in a tone of enforced calmness, to the waiting servant:

"Tell the messenger that there is no answer."

The servant bowed and withdrew.

"What is it, dear?" inquired Abel Force.

"Nothing that needs attention to-night," she replied, with assumed indifference.

And Abel Force, thinking it to be some little domestic matter that might not be discussed before a stranger, and perfectly unsuspicious of anything secret or serious—thinking no evil—dropped the subject then and there, and forgot.

"Ah-h-h! Yaw-w-w! I never was so tired and sleepy in all my life before!" cried Mrs. Anglesea, throwing herself back in her chair, and stretching her mouth and limbs with a tremendous yawn.

"No doubt you are, madam. You have had a most fatiguing day. Permit me!' said Mr. Force, and he lighted a wax taper and put it in her hand.

"And what on earth am I to do with this, old man?" she demanded, between two gapes.

"It is to light you to your room," said Mrs. Force, answering for her dismayed husband. "Can you find your way, or shall I see you to the door?"

"Is it that fine room fixed up with maple wood and blue calico, where the gals took me to take off my bonnet and wash my face and hands?"

"Yes, it is the same. Shall I show you the way?"

"Lord, no, 'oman! I ain't a baby! But I reckon you may toss me in a nightgown and nightcap before you go to bed yourself, for, you know, I come here right from the church, and, of course, didn't fetch any 'long o' me."

"I think you will find all those conveniences laid out on your bed," said Mrs. Force.

"All right! Good-night, ole 'oman!" And she kissed Mrs. Force, to that lady's dismay. "I'm sorry I had to make such a fuss in the church to-day, but I couldn't help it, and it is all for the best. Good-night, ole man! Lord, why, I feel just as if I had knowed you all the days of my life, and you was my own kinfolks! So here goes!" And she stood on tiptoes and pulled down Mr. Force's black-whiskered face and kissed him.

And he bore the punishment with much more fortitude than his wife had done.

Then the frank, rude, handsome creature, in whom there was no wickedness at all, took up her wax taper again, laughed, nodded and went out.

"Well, for a woman who has been robbed of her fortune and forsaken by her husband, she takes life quite cheerfully," said Elfrida Force, with a touch of sarcasm in her manner.

"It is her healthy constitution and happy, animal spirits that enables her to do so," said Abel Force, apologetically.

"She is very ill bred!" said Elfrida.

"That is her misfortune, not her fault, poor thing! But enough of her. How is our darling this evening?"

"Fast asleep, with a regular, normal pulse and respiration. To-morrow she will be quite restored, I think."

"Heaven grant it!" fervently exclaimed Abel Force.

Then he touched the timbre that was to summon Jake, to close up fenders and put out lights.

And then the husband and wife went upstairs together.

When they reached the landing, they were startled by a loud rapping on the inside of Mrs. Anglesea's door.

"She wants something that has been forgotten, I suppose. Go on, Abel, and I will stop and see what she requires," said Elfrida Force.

And the gentleman passed on to his apartments, while the lady paused at their visitor's door.

"Say! Hi! Ole 'oman! You! I want you!" cried the guest, from within, as the lady approached.

"Well, what is it?" inquired Elfrida Force.

"Is your ole man outside?"

"No; he has gone to his room."

"Then it's all right, and I can come out," replied the woman, opening the door and standing there in her ascension robes, while she held up, at arm's length, one of Elfrida's own fine cambric nightdresses, and exclaimed:

"Look here, I say! I can't get into this thing! Why, look at me and look at it! You might's well try to squeeze a pumpkin into a pint pot, as me in it!"

Mrs. Force saw, and recognized the dilemma. The stout woman could not wear one of her night robes; and, if not one of hers, certainly not one of Miss Meeke's, or of either the young girls'—all of which were smaller than her own. What was to be done now?

The lady stood confounded for a moment, and then a bright thought struck her.

"I will find one to fit you, and bring it," she said.

"That's you!" exclaimed the woman.

Elfrida Force turned away and went into her own room to get the wax taper which her husband had carried there, and then she went up into the garret and waked up old Aunt Lucy, who was even stouter than Mrs. Anglesea, and who had a treasure that was the pride of her heart—a small chest, full of fine, snow-white underclothing, that was laid up in lavender, and only taken out to be shown to acquaintances, but never worn.

When Luce was roused out of her sleep, to see her

mistress standing over her, with a taper in her hand, she was frightened half out of her wits at—she knew not what, but she instinctively gasped out:

"It's a habit dey gibs deirselves—nuffin' 'tall but a habit dey gibs deirselves!"

"Luce, wake up! I want you to do me a favor."

"Yes, mist'ess! It's a hab——" But a wide gape cut off her proverb.

"Luce! I want you to be so kind as to lend Mrs. Anglesea one of your best, new nightdresses," said the lady.

"Yes, mist'ess, nightgowns. It a hab—— You!" with another yawn.

It was full ten minutes before the lady could bring the half-sleeping woman to a consciousness of what was wanted.

Then, indeed, Luce was all attention and alertness, proud to accommodate the visitor. She went to her chest and opened it, filling the room with the fragrance of sweet herbs, and she selected her finest gown, "the one trimmed with torture lace," as she called it, meaning torchon, and she offered to take it herself down to the stranger. But Mrs. Force would not permit her to do that, and, with the gown over her arm, she went downstairs and into the room of her guest.

"Now, then, this here is something like a gownd," said Mrs. Anglesea, admiringly. "And, oh, sakes! don't it smell sweet! Hoome! Ah-h-h!" she exclaimed, pressing the garment up to her face and strongly inhaling its fragrance.

"Good-night," said the hostess, turning away.

"Good-night! Hoome—ah-h-h! how sweet it is!"

"And what a thorough animal you are!" thought the lady, as she left the happy creature delighting herself in the fragrance of lavender and amber.

One more visit Mrs. Force made before she sought her own pillow. She went into Odalite's room, and found

her sleeping quietly, with little Elva, in a warm wrapper, lying in an easy chair by her side.

"Why, my little darling, why are you not in bed?" inquired the lady.

"Oh, mamma, because I thought I would sit here with Odalite until you should come, to see if she should want anything."

"It was a kind thought, my tender, little love; but now you may go to bed. Kiss me. God bless you, little tender heart!"

And so, with love and kisses and blessings, Elfrida Force dismissed her gentlest child to rest.

Then she bent over Odalite, and saw that she was sleeping well and breathing easily. She took her hand, and found that her skin was cool and moist, and her pulse was regular.

She kissed the sleeper on the brow, and then knelt and prayed for pardon of that long-past folly, as she prayed daily and nightly; she prayed for protection for those she loved from the machinations of the evil and the designing, and for guidance and help in her perplexities and sorrows. When she finished, she arose and left the chamber.

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## CHAPTER XXVI

### THE DAY AFTER THE WEDDING

Mrs. Anglesea was up with the sun the next morning. She replenished the smoldering fire from wood that she found in a box at the bottom of the closet. Then she threw open the front and side windows of her corner room, and looked out on the bright, crisp, winter morning.

The ground and the bare trees were glistening with white frost, and beyond and below stretched the blue

waters of the bay, intensely blue now under the clear, winter sky.

"It's a pretty place, but, whewew! how cold!" she said, with a shudder, as she pulled down the sash of the last window and turned to the fire.

She could hardly persuade herself to leave it, but, fearing she might be late for breakfast, she at length arose, and made her toilet, hastily and carelessly, with a few splashes of water on her face and neck and a hasty drying, interrupted in the middle to press the lavender-scented white damask to her face to inhale its fragrance. Then she ran a comb through the thick locks of her curly hair, which she finally bunched up into a big mass at the back of her head. At last she put on her clothes, and left her room, noisily banging the door in closing it.

There was no one in the upper hall. All the chamber doors leading from it were shut.

"I reckon they are all at breakfast, and the coffee will be stark cold when I get there. I wish they had waked me up, but I reckon they thought I was tired. I am never too tired to eat," she muttered to herself as she went downstairs.

She hurried directly to the dining room, where she found a fine, open fire burning, and Luce engaged in setting the table.

"Why, Lord!" said the visitor. "Ain't you had breakfast yet? I thought as I should be ever so late!"

"Dear me, ma'am! Is it you? W'y didn't you ring?" inquired, in turn, the surprised negro woman.

"Ring? What should I ring for?" demanded the visitor, drawing a chair before the blazing fire, seating herself, putting her feet upon the fender, and pulling up the edge of her skirt to toast her shins.

Luce paused in her task of placing the knives and forks to look at the vandal.

"Why, ma'am, for somebody to come an' wait on yer, an' fix the fire, an' fetch hot water, an' that," she said.

"Fiddle-de-dee! Wait on your granny!" said the stranger, holding her chubby hands over the fire, and rubbing them, with a sense of comfort.

But Luce had finished placing the knives and forks, and was now bringing china from a corner buffet.

"What's that you have got in your hand there? Is it the sugar pot?" asked the intruder.

"Yes, ma'am," answered the perplexed woman.

"Hold it here to me."

Luce complied, and the visitor took the sugar bowl and poured from it a handful of white lumps, and returned it, saying:

"I reckon I'll champ this sugar to pass away the time while I'm waiting for 'em to come down."

"Ain't you afeared it will take away your appetite for breakfast, ma'am?" inquired Luce.

"Take away my appetite? Ho! ho! ho! That's a good un!" chuckled the guest, as she crunched the sugar in her strong, white teeth.

"Don't yer think as yer'd be more comferable in de parlor, ma'am? Dere's a splendid fire burning dere," suggested Luce.

"No. I'm all right here. I feel just as 'snug as a bug in a rug.' Don't mind, nigger. Go on and do your work."

"Nigger!" Luce had never been so insulted in all her life before, yet she saw that the good-natured creature who was toasting herself before the fire did not mean to insult her.

"Say! I s'pose you've heard all about me, haven't you?" inquired the latter.

"Ma'am?" questioned Luce, hardly knowing how to answer.

"I say, you know who I am, don't you?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am. You are Col. Anglesea's lady," promptly replied Luce.

" 'Col. Anglesea's lady?' What do you mean by that,

nigger? I am Col. Anglesea's wife, I'd have you to know! Now, what did you mean by 'lady'?" demanded the stranger, with spirit.

"I am sure, ma'am, I didn't mean no offense wotsomdever. I meant to be more 'spectful in sayin' lady," soothingly replied Luce.

"Well, then, never do you call me a 'lady.' 'Lady' is too unsartain a word. I'm that man's wife, not 'lady.' "

"That's true, ma'am, an' I'm sorry as I made a mistake," said Luce, more humbly, because of a secret irony.

"I s'pose you've heard all about that rumpus in the church?"

"Somefin' of it, ma'am," discreetly observed Luce.

"Only something of it? Well, then, I will tell you all about it. It will pass away the time while waiting for breakfast."

Luce, divided between her curiosity and her love of gossip on the one hand, and her conscientious sense of propriety on the other, made no direct reply.

Mrs. Anglesea began at the beginning and rehearsed all her wrongs, just as she had done to the family in the drawing room on the previous evening.

Luce went in and out between the kitchen and the dining room, and to and fro between the sideboard, the buffet and the table, with a:

" 'Scuse, ma'am," every time she went out of hearing.

"How in the deuce can you attend to anything I am saying if you keep jumping around so?" demanded the narrator.

" 'Scuse me, ma'am; I hears yer good enough, thank yer, ma'am; an' I has to finish settin' de table," pleaded the woman.

"But you make me fidgety, having to turn my head around every minute after you."

"Werry sorry, ma'am, but de family will 'spect de breakfas' to be ready for 'em. It's—it's a habit dey gibs deirselbes, yer see, ma'am," pleaded Luce. And at the

same moment Jake appeared, with a large waiter in his hands, on which were set the hot edibles to be arranged on the table.

With the help of Luce, he put them all in place, and then took a big, brass bell, and rang it with all his might close to the head of the guest.

"Lord bless us! I like music, but not that sort!" cried the latter, clapping her fat hands over the thick, black curls that covered her ears.

Mr. and Mrs. Force came in, followed by all the family, with the exception of Odalite, who was still in bed, and little Elva, who had volunteered to stay with her.

"Oh, you are here, Mrs. Anglesea? I did not know. I had just sent a servant to call you to breakfast. I hope you slept well?" said the hostess, pleasantly.

"Splendid! Never turned in my bed all night. And how are you? And how is the young gal this morning?" inquired the visitor.

"We are all well, thank you. Will you take this seat, nearest the fire?"

"Oh, anywheres convenient. I don't care where I sit."

The other members of the family party greeted the visitor, and then seated themselvs at the table.

The visitor was voluble, as usual, prasing everything she tasted, and eating heartily of every dish.

When they all arose from the table, she shook the crumbs off her lap on the floor, turned to her hostess, and said:

"Now, old 'oman, if you've got any sewing to do, here's the hands that can do it. I ain't one to sit down and eat the bread of idleness, I tell you. So, if you have got any stockings to darn, or shirts to patch, or anything else to be done in the way of making or mending, just give it to me, and I'll earn my keep, I tell you."

Mrs. Force was so taken by surprise at this speech that she had to pause before replying:

"I thank you very much, but I should not like to trouble you."

"Trouble! Why, you precious ninny, it would be the greatest of pleasure to me. Ain't I making myself at home here? Same as one of you? Go along with you! Get me something to do!"

"Many thanks, but I fear I cannot find anything to-day."

"I'll find something, mamma," Wynnette exclaimed, coming to the rescue. Turning to Mrs. Anglesea, she said:

"Dear ma'am, wouldn't you like to come into the schoolroom with Miss Meeke and me and help us to tie up parcels for Christmas presents to the colored people?"

"Of course I will, if you want me to. But, Lord, that's no work!"

"Oh, yes, it is. There are more than twenty parcels, little and big. And all the stores are in large bundles, and we have got to divide them fairly, and tie them up, and write the names on them. It will take us all the morning."

"All right; I will go 'long of you, and help with the dividing and tying up. I don't know about the names. I ain't very good at writing," said the guest, allowing herself to be carried off by Wynnette.

"How in the name of the Inscrutable could Anglesea ever have been tempted to marry such a woman? Was he drunk, I wonder?" whispered Abel Force to his wife.

The lady shook her head.

"I have given it up," she replied.

Mrs. Force went upstairs, to send little Elva down to her breakfast, and to sit beside Odalite.

Mr. Force went into the little den at the back of the hall, where he kept his writing desk and account books and held interviews with his overseer or his attorney.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### CONFIRMATION FROM ST. SEBASTIAN

"I AM going to ride over to Greenbushes this morning, sir; can I do anything for you before I go?" inquired Leonidas, entering the sanctum where the master of the house sat writing at his desk.

"My dear boy, is it absolutely necessary that you should go to Greenbushes to-day?"

"Oh, no, sir; not at all; nor will I go, if I can be of the least service to you by staying here."

"I am expecting our rector this morning. I am hoping that he will bring me some decisive news from St. Sebastian that may end this terrible suspense."

" 'Suspense,' sir? Do you also think that there may be some doubt about the truth of Mrs. Anglesea's story?"

"When I look at the woman, and think of the man, I can scarcely believe her to be his wife. Why, she is illiterate and ill bred to the lowest degree!"

'I think she is infinitely above him!" indignantly exclaimed Le.

"In point of honesty, yes; for he is as despicable a miscreant as ever lived; but, still, not likely to have married such a woman. And it may be possible that there was no California marriage at all. Therefore I feel very anxious to get this telegram."

"But, sir, in case this woman who claims to be his wife has been deceived by a false marriage, and she is therefore not his wife, but his victim, and it should follow that the marriage ceremony performed yesterday should be legal——"

"It should not stand!" roared Abel Force, in sudden wrath. "It should be dissolved by law! In no case shall my daughter ever behold the face of that wretch again!"

"De Reberent Dr. Peters, sah, is waitin' to see yer," said Jake, putting his head into the door.

"Is there any one in the drawing room?"

"No, sah."

"Then show Dr. Peters into the drawing room, and tell him that I will see him there in a moment."

The man went to give his message.

Mr. Force put away his papers, locked his desk, and arose, saying:

"Come, Le; our suspense will be ended in another minute."

"I have been in painful suspense," answered the young man, as they went up the front hall, and entered the drawing room on the right hand side.

Dr. Peters arose and advanced to meet them.

"Good-morning, reverend sir; I am glad to see you. In one word, now: Have you an answer to your telegram?"

"Yes."

"And what is it?"

"The marriage certificate shown you is genuine. It corresponds in every particular with the entry of the same date in the parish register of the church of St. Sebastian where the ceremony was performed."

"Thank Heaven! then my daughter is free!" exclaimed Abel Force.

"Here is the telegram—a very lengthy but quite satisfactory one," said the rector, drawing from his pocket a large coil of what looked like white measuring tape.

Abel Force took it and read it aloud. It need not be repeated here. Enough to say that it was conclusive.

"And the scoundrel knew that he had a living wife, when he led my daughter to the altar! Reverend sir, what should a father, in his righteous wrath, do with such a man?" demanded Abel Force, livid with rage.

"Leave him to the divine Providence," reverently replied the rector.

Abel Force ground his teeth; he felt more like becoming a volunteer instrument of the vengeance of divine Providence.

"A Christian would curb his passion and let the evil-doer go his way," continued the rector.

"Then I am a sinner!" exclaimed Le, who had been turning red and white with every ebb and flow of emotion.

"A yielding to anger always tends to make bad worse," said Dr. Peters.

"Uncle," said Le—who always, it will be remembered, addressed his relative by this title—"have you any more commands for me?"

"No, my boy; I only wished you to stay to hear this telegram, if it should come. You have heard it, and now I will relieve you."

"Yes, I have heard it! I have heard it! Good-day, uncle! Good-day, Dr. Peters!" said the young man, rising.

"When will you be back, Le?" inquired Mr. Force.

"Some time this evening, I hope, sir; but don't wait for me," replied the midshipman, and, with another bow, he left the room.

"What is that lad thinking of?" anxiously inquired the rector.

"Nothing unworthy of my ward, or your pupil, reverend sir, we may be sure of that!" replied the squire.

"Young blood is hot and hasty!" sighed the good man.

As he spoke, the door opened, and Mrs. Force entered.

"Good-morning, Dr. Peters! I have just met Leonidas Force, who told me of your arrival, as he hurried from the house, but told me no more. I could not restrain my impatience. What answer, if any, is there to the telegram?" she eagerly inquired.

They told her.

"Thank Heaven!" she exclaimed, fervently, clasping

her hands and sinking into the chair just vacated by Leonidas.

The serious walks side by side with the farcical.

The door opened unceremoniously, and Mrs. Anglesea entered, shaking her skirts to shake off ends of soft twine and scraps of lint or paper that stuck to her dress, and exclaimed:

"Well, I've got through with helping the young uns to tie them parcels, and, Lord! wa'n't there a lot of them! And I come downstairs to look for the ole 'oman, and they told me she was in here 'long of the parson, so I knowed you had come about the telegraph message; and how do you do, sir, this morning? And I hope you find yerself very well, and it's all right about the sitifikit and the parish register, eh?"

"They are all correct, madam, I believe—the certificate and the entries in the register perfectly corresponding," replied Dr. Peters.

"Oh, I knowed that; I never expected nothing else, of course. I only wanted the ole folks here to be satisfied as the gal had no right to my ole man, and would only ruinate herself, if she took him."

"Will you take a seat, ma'am?" inquired Mr. Force, rising and bringing forward a large, cushioned armchair.

"Lord, no! I don't want to disturb you! I only come to hear the upshot of this business! I went in the kitchen just now, and asked the cook if I could help her, and she said no; but I saw a heap of currants and raisins on the table to be picked for the plum pudding, and now I am going to help her to do it, whether or no! Well, I reckon I shall stay 'long o' you all till the spring, and try make myself useful and cheerful and contented, as it ain't never no use crying for spilt milk; and, then, I reckon as I can't get any of my money out'n that man —Lord! why, he's gambled it all away long a-merry-a-go! I'll just go back to Wild Cats', and open a miners'

boarding house! The boys won't let me want! And I s'pose by the time I make another pile my rascal will be coming back to me, to get hold of it! For that's the way they all do! But just let him, that's all! The boys would give him a short trial and a long rope, you bet! You needn't look so horrified, Mr. Parson. You just wait till some foreign beat comes and marries you, and then runs off with all your money, and then see how you'd feel!"

The aged husband of an old wife, the father of married sons and daughters, the grandfather of growing or grown-up boys and girls, could not, by any effort of imagination, put himself in the wrong wife's case; so he only answered by a deprecating bow.

"Well, now I must be going, if I mean to pick them dried currants and raisins for the plum pudding!" said the intruder, and she left the room as suddenly and unceremoniously as she had entered.

"What do you think of our guest, Dr. Peters?" inquired Mrs. Force.

"A rough, untrained, but well-meaning, woman, I should say," replied the rector.

"A mere good-natured animal, I should call her," added the squire.

"My dear, have you got through with your accounts?" inquired the lady.

"Yes, for the present."

"Then let us go into the parlor. It is so much pleasanter there. Come, Dr. Peters."

They left the room, and went into the cheerful, little parlor, usually occupied by Mrs. Force, and having her worktable and low chair in the corner between the open wood fire and the side window, with its pleasant view of the lawn and the woods.

Scarcely were they seated, however, when little Elva came in, first gave her hand to the old minister, who

drew her toward him and kissed her cheek, and then went to her mother, and said:

"Mamma, Odalite is wide, wide awake now. She has had some tea, and she wants to see you."

"Very well, dear; I will go to her. You will excuse me, Dr. Peters?"

The rector replied with a bow and a smile.

The lady took the hand of the little girl, and they left the room together.

When they reached Odalite's chamber, Mrs. Force was surprised to see her eldest daughter up and dressed, and sitting in the armchair before the fire.

"My darling, I am so glad to see you so well recovered!" exclaimed the lady, pressing a kiss upon the forehead of her child, and then drawing a chair and seating herself by her side.

"Mamma," said Odalite, "I seem to have been in a trance, or a dream, ever since you gave me that composing draught! What was it—opium, hasheesh, amyle —what? And, mother, how much was real and how much was dream that I have passed through? It seems like the phantasmagoria of a midnight orgie—through which only one thing seems to stand out clearly—that I have had 'some outlet through thunder and lightning' into freedom! Mother, is it true? Am I free?"

"Yes, dearest dear, you are free!" replied the lady, in deep emotion.

"Oh, thank Heaven! Thank Heaven! Oh, I feel as if I could never thank Heaven enough!" exclaimed Odalite, convulsively clasping her hands.

There was silence between them for a few moments, and then Odalite, looking all around the room, and finding herself alone with her mother, dropped her voice to the tenderest murmur, and asked:

"But, mamma, sweet mamma, are you free? Are you free from that man's threats and persecutions?"

"Ah, my dear, I do not know! I do not know!" sighed the lady.

"Then, darling mother, if you are not free, I am not. I am your bondsmaid, and I am your hostage to that man for your deliverance from him. I wish to be nothing else, mamma. I do wish to give my whole life, if it be necessary, to secure your peace of mind."

"My own, own heavenly angel, the sacrifice will not be required. You have been once offered, and you have been wonderfully delivered. It is final, my darling. No victim was ever laid a second time upon the fire!"

"But yet you are not free, mamma?"

"I do not know. I cannot even conjecture what the monster's next move may be. But I do know this—that, whatever he does, or attempts to do, he will not be permitted to touch you, or even to see or to speak to you again!"

"Oh, I should be overjoyed to hear that, if only you were free from him, sweet mother!"

"My darling, the arm that delivered you is not shortened that it cannot save. For, Odalite, whatever the instrument might have been, it was the hand of Providence that saved you."

"I know it, mamma. And I will hope and trust. You never did any evil in your life. You have only suffered from evildoers. Why, on that account, should you continue to suffer? Yes, I will hope and trust. And, mamma, I have roused myself, and am going down to dinner to surprise papa. And then, oh, do let us try to recover the good, old days of peace and gladness that we had before the tempter and destroyer came. Who is downstairs besides our own family?"

"Dr. Peters is here. He brought confirmation of that monster's Californian marriage."

"Oh, I am very glad of that! I would have it confirmed and reconfirmed forever and ever. Who else is downstairs, mamma?"

"Mrs. Anglesea. Your father asked her to the house, that we might hear her statement in more detail. And she seems to like her quarters so well that I am inclined to think that she will stay just as long as she is permitted to do so."

"Well, mamma, let her stay. Poor woman! To be deserted by her husband! Is she very unhappy?"

"Not she! I should say that she is the most happily constituted human being I ever saw. She has the soundest health, the finest appetite, the keenest senses and the dullest sensibilities that I ever heard of. She has no more sentiment than if she ran upon four feet, instead of two! Give her full bodily comforts and pleasures, which she can feel and enjoy, and she will be perfectly happy."

"Oh, mamma, what a character!"

"But that she is very—what shall I say of her that will not seem harsh or uncharitable?"

"Very unsophisticated and very unconventional, mamma?" suggested Odalite.

"Yes, dear, that will do. But for those drawbacks, you may find her amusing."

"But perhaps she is more amusing on account of those drawbacks, mamma," suggested Odalite.

But her mother shuddered.

There was a little bustle at the chamber door, which opened suddenly.

Mrs. Force turned around, and exclaimed:

"Here comes Wynnette, delighted to see you up! And now, dear, I will leave you with your sister, and return to our visitors. You will be down to dinner, you say?"

"Oh, yes, mamma—certainly," said Odalite.

Mrs. Force kissed her daughter, and left the room.

"Mrs. Colonel is a whole regiment, I tell you, Odalite!" she heard Wynnette say, as she closed the door.

Odalite kept her word, and joined her family and friends in the drawing room just before dinner.

Her father met her halfway across the room, kissed her, and led her to a chair by the fire.

The rector came and gravely congratulated her.

Joshua, the bulldog, who had followed her from the hall, came and laid his honest head on her lap.

Lastly, Mrs. Col. Anglesea drew a chair to her side, sat down in it, took her hand, looked tenderly in her eyes, and said:

"You're not mad 'long o' me, are you, honey, for coming and raising a big rumpus in the church and stopping of the marriage, are you, now?"

"Angry with you? No, indeed! I am more grateful to you than words can express!" impulsively exclaimed Odalite.

"That's right! That's the proper sperrit, that is! Why, Lord, he ain't much, if he is a colonel into the army! It's only the Injun Army, anyways! And we know what the Injuns is! Leastways, we know what the Injuns is here, and I don't reckon they're any better out yonder, t'other side of the world! No, honey, he ain't much! Why, Lord, there are heaps of fine young fellows would be glad enough to get you! Why, there is that fine young fellow, that midshipman staying here! Why couldn't you fancy him, now? And lots of others! Let alone taking up with a man older and uglier than your own fath—I mean, than the parson! You've no call to hang your harp on a willow tree, on account of the likes of him!"

"Indeed, ma'am, I do not in the least regret Col. Anglesea," said Odalite, earnestly.

"Lord, don't you, sure enough? Then you wa'n't so very fond of him, after all? Oh, bother! there's that clang-clang of a dinner bell again!" said the speaker, stopping short in her speech.

"Shall I have the honor, madam?" inquired the mas-

ter of the house, coming up and offering his arm to take her into the dining room.

The rector spent the evening at Mondreer, and then, as a snowstorm was threatened, he accepted his host's and hostess' invitation and stayed all night with them.

Leonidas Force did not return to Mondreer that evening, but the circumstance caused no surprise nor uneasiness, as the young master of Greenbushes was often detained by business to so late an hour that he spent the night at the place.

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## CHAPTER XXVIII

### A STORM BREWING AT MISS SIBBY'S

"Now, TELL the truth, and shame the devil, Roland Bayard! Where have you been for the last twenty-four hours?" inquired Miss Sibby, on the afternoon of the same day that witnessed the rector's visit to Mondreer.

"To tell you the truth, then, Aunt Sibby, I have been to Port Tobacco, waiting for a telegram."

"A telegram!"

"Yes, a telegram. After the wedding circus yesterday, the nobs decided to cuss the cost and send several miles of telegram to California, to find out the truth about that alleged marriage."

"Yes, I heard that."

"Well, the squire couldn't take the message, and so he asked the rector to do it. And the rector promised everything the squire wanted, and then, when it was too late to go back from his word, he remembered that he had to make a sick call on a man that was given over by the doctors, and might have to stay with him all night. And I was there, and heard him bewailing his dilemma,

and—what could a gentleman do? I offered to take the message to Port Tobacco, and wait there for the answer."

"Well, and to make a long story short, you went there and took the opportunity to stay all night and go on a lark among them low-life tavern people—you, the only adopted nephew and namesake of a lady descended from the Duke of England! I'm ashamed of you!" said Miss Bayard, wrathfully.

"I went there, and gave the message at the telegraph office, and waited for an answer until the office closed for the night. Then I went to the quietest hotel I could find——"

"Oh, yes, I know you did!" ironically interpolated the old lady.

"And I just took a chop and a cup of coffee, and went to bed," continued the youth, without noticing the interruption. "And the first thing the next morning I went to the office, and waited until it was opened. And the first telegram that came clicking over the wires was the one I waited for. And, as soon as ever I got it, I only waited to swallow a cup of coffee and a roll, mounted my horse, and hurried back to the rectory. And as soon as I gave his reverence the telegram I set off here!"

"And I have been that anxious about you!" whimpered the old lady. "And now, tell me, did you know anything about that woman a being of that furriner's wife when you fetched her here to my house?"

"Yes, aunty, I knew it."

"And why didn't you tell me?"

"Because I was sworn to secrecy! And, if I had not been sworn, still, I could never have betrayed a woman's confidence. The adopted nephew of the Duke of England's descendant could never do that, you know!" said the boy, with a sly twinkle in his blue eyes.

"No, to be sure," gravely replied Miss Sibby, quite unconscious that she was laughed at.

"There! There's Le! Hello, old fellow! Come in!"

cried Roland, starting up and tearing open the front door as he saw young Force ride up and fling himself from the saddle.

"Why, what in the—deuce is the matter with you, old boy?" demanded the young sailor, on seeing the grave aspect of his friend's countenance.

"I want you to do a favor for me, Bayard," said Le, pausing on the outside of the door, and speaking in a whisper.

"It is done!" exclaimed Roland, seizing his friend's hand and slapping his own into it.

"I want you to take a challenge for me."

"A—what?"

"A challenge!"

"Heaven, earth and—t'other place! Whom are you about to challenge?"

"That miscreant Anglesea."

"You are not going to fight a duel, Le?"

"I shall fight a duel or do a murder! That's the alternative!"

"Perhaps you may do both."

"So much the better! But, if you do not want to take my challenge, say so, and you need not do it. I will get some one else."

"Of course I will, Le! And I will be your second, and will stand by you, through thick and thin! Jove, if ever a man had a just cause, you have! He supplanted you in the affections of your betrothed, and tried to betray her to ruin!"

"Don't talk about it, or I shall go mad! It was bad enough when I came home expecting to marry my little girl immediately, and to take her right home to our pleasant farmhouse, to find that I had lost her forever! Still, for her dear sake, I bore that. But now, to know that the man who won her from me had a living wife, and deliberately planned her ruin—— Oh-h-h! I shall go mad!"

"What has excited you so, Le?"

"The telegram! I have heard the telegram from the Rev. Dr. Minitree read, confirming all that woman told us!"

"But, dear Le, you had heard her story!"

"I never believed it. Heaven knows, I never believed it! It seemed too unlikely, too preposterous, that the man should have married that woman!"

"But, dear Le, I gave you a hint of how the case stood when we first met, and I saw how cut up you were about losing the girl. I gave you as strong a hint as I could give without breaking faith with the woman, that no marriage could take place between Col. Anglesea and Miss Force."

"Oh, you told me, in a mysterious, oracular sort of way, that something would be sure to happen to prevent the marriage; and, when I doubted, you pledged your honor that there would be an arrest of the proceedings. And then I almost believed you without further explanation; but, when that woman claimed the bridegroom as her husband, I thought you might have been deceived by an adventuress with forged marriage certificates, and I doubted the whole story, until it was confirmed by the telegram. Now the villain shall answer to me for his outrageous crimes against me and mine!"

"Come in, Le, and sit down, and calm yourself. Aunt Sibby will be glad to see you."

"No, no, I cannot. I must go back to Greenbushes. My overseer needs me. You said you would take my challenge and be my second?"

"Yes, indeed, I will, with all my heart and soul!"

"Then here is the missive. Take it at once to that scoundrel. You will find him at the Calvert Hotel. Make all the arrangements, and then come and report to me at Greenbushes. Will you do so?"

"Indeed, I will. You may rely upon me, old fellow."

"'Thank you, thank you!" said Le, warmly, as he

handed an enveloped note to Roland, remounted his horse and rode off.

Roland Bayard turned and opened the door, to go into the house, and almost stumbled over Miss Sibby in his progress.

"Why, aunty, I beg your pardon. I didn't know you were there. I almost knocked you over. Were you going out?"

"No, I wasn't going out," replied the old lady, in some confusion, as she turned away.

"Aunty, I shall have to go out myself this evening, so, if I am not home by sunset, don't wait up for me."

"Why, where are you going?"

"I am going to the Calvert Hotel on some business."

"What business?"

"Well, it is business connected with the broken-off wedding."

"Seems to me you are a good deal mixed up with this rumpus. What kind of business is it?"

"It is of a confidential nature, auntie, else I could explain it to you."

"Humph! humph! humph!" sniffed the old lady.

The young man laid the enveloped note he had received from Le on the mantelpiece, and went upstairs to put on his best clothes, in which to execute his important mission.

Miss Sibby went and took the note in her hand, looked at it wistfully, then laid it down, and took her spectacles out of her pocket, wiped them, and put them on her nose. Then she took the note up again and read the address.

"To Col. A. Anglesea, Calvert Hotel."

Then she turned it over and examined it. The gummed edges of the envelope had but lightly adhered. She saw that a slight touch would open them.

She sat down in her low chair, with the note in her hand, and considered. She could hear Roland moving about overhead, and knew that he was safe to be there for ten or fifteen minutes.

She was tempted, but not so much by curiosity as by interest and anxiety in and on account of the boys.

"Them lads is up to somethink!" she said to herself. "I knowed they was up to somethink as soon as I heard 'em talking together! I couldn't hear half they said, because the wind was a-blowin' the wrong way, but I knowed they was up to somethink! They always is! Them boys is!

"When two or three of them is gathered together, it ain't the Lord, but the devil, as is in the midst of them. Now, I'm gwine to see what's in this note."

She opened the envelope, and read words that made her hair fairly stand on end.

"The Lord have mercy upon me, a miserable sinner! What is the boys a-coming to in these times, anyhow? This mustn't go, noways!"

And then she did a very sly thing.

The challenge was written on a sheet of very thick, white note paper. It filled only the first page. Miss Sibby tore off the written page, folded it in its own folds, and put it in her pocket. Then she took the blank half of the sheet, folded it, also, and put it back into the envelope. Lastly, she wet the gummed edges of the envelope, and stuck them down, fastening the note much more securely than she had found it.

"Now, then, Roland will make a fool of hisself carrying of a blank note. And I will take myself off to Mondreer, soon as ever I can go, and I will show this here challenge to Mr. Force. And he, being a justice of the peace, will be bound to send out a warrant to 'rest up that bloody-minded young rip of a cousin of hizzen! Lor'! what a time there'll be!"

## CHAPTER XXIX

### A YOUNG FIRE EATER

When the family and guests of Mondreer arose the next morning, they found the ground covered with snow, but the sky was clear and bright.

The squire and the rector went out on the front porch to look at the weather, just in time to see old Miss Sibby Bayard, in her brown riding skirt and beaver-cloth jacket and hood, ambling up to the house on her slow, but sure-footed, old, white mule.

Both gentlemen stepped down to the horse block to meet and help her to dismount.

"I reckon as you're surprised to see me here, especially at this hour of the morning?" said the old lady, as she lumbered heavily down from her seat.

"We are glad to see you, at any rate, neighbor," said the kind-hearted squire.

"Thanky'! I'm glad to see you, squire, though I wish I had come on more pleasanter business," replied the old lady, as she waddled toward the house.

"I hope nothing has gone amiss with you," said Mr. Force, whom recent events had made somewhat apprehensive.

"Well, not gone amiss, exactly; but going amiss, I tell you all good, unless it is put a stop to! And, Parson Peters, I'm mighty glad to fall in long o' you here! I think it is downright providential—that I do! Because your counsel may be of great vally in this case. 'Two heads is better than one,' sez I, even if one is a cabbage head, sez I."

By this time they had entered the house, and Mr. Force was about to open the parlor door to admit the visitor to the presence of his wife, but she stopped him, hastily, nervously saying:

"No, no, not in there, on no account! This ain't no news for ladies' ears, and I don't want to send none of them into hysterick fits! Let me go into your office, where you do business."

"What is the nature of your business?" anxiously inquired Mr. Force, as he led the way to the rear of the house.

"Life or death! Murder and hanging, for aught I know! And that's the last word I'm a-going to speak till we get inside o' your office, and lock the door after us."

In great anxiety—for his suspicions immediately flew to Leonidas and Anglesea—Mr. Force led the way into his sanctum, secured it against intrusion, and seated his guests, and awaited the further communication of the last comer. What would it be? Had Leonidas made a fatal assault upon Anglesea? Had Miss Bayard learned the fact through Le's bosom friend, Roland Bayard?

Miss Sibby seemed in no hurry to communicate her business.

"Is that door locked?" she inquired.

"Fast," replied Mr. Force.

"Could anybody hear us if they was to listen at the keyhole?"

"No one about the house would be guilty of such an impropriety."

"I don't know that."

Mr. Force got up, took an overcoat from a hook on the wall and hung it against the door.

"Now, then!" he said, resuming his seat.

"Now, then!" said Miss Sibby, fumbling in her pocket, producing a neatly folded, white paper, and handing it to the squire. "Now, then, what do you think of that for a bloody-minded young wilyun? Oh, I tell yer, boys is the devil!"

Mr. Force unfolded and read the paper, staring at it in dismay.

"How came you by this?" he inquired.

"Interslipted of it!" she replied.

"Then this never reached its destination?"

"Eh?"

"This never was delivered?"

"Not much! There'd 'a' been murder done before this if it had been! And there'll be murder done yet if there ain't a stop put to it! Let me tell you all how and about it."

And, while the squire and the rector listened, with the most painful interest, Miss Sibby told of Leonidas Force's sudden visit of the previous afternoon, of her suspicions, and of her seizing an opportunity afforded and opening the envelope, taking out the sheet of note paper, tearing off the half containing the challenge, folding and replacing the other leaf, and finally closing up the envelope, and returning it to its place.

"My wagabone of a 'dopted nevvy took the note without suspicion, and went off with it. I'd like to 'a' seen that colonel's face when he opened it and found nothing but a blank paper! Howsever, I haven't seen hair nor hide of my scamp since, so I don't know how it all ended! And I don't know where he is! But naught's never in danger, and I reckon as he is safe and sound with t'other scamp at Greenbushes."

"What do you think of this, now, for a mad missive? Oh, read it out—read it out! I know how it looks! I want to hear how it sounds!" said the squire, as he passed the challenge over to the rector, and watched the latter staring at the lines.

And, with his hair gradually rising on end, the good man read as follows:

"GREENBUSHES, December 21, 18—,

"To COL. ANGUS ANGLESEA—Sir: You are not only a disgrace to your uniform, but a dishonor to the human form! You are a thief, a liar and a coward! I have

written your character in ink, and I mean to seal it in blood! The bearer of this will meet any man you may appoint to make arrangements. I have the honor to be,

"Le Force."

"The boy is mad!" said the rector, as he returned the paper and wiped his spectacles.

"And now, what is to be done?" inquired the squire.

"'What's to be done?'" exclaimed Miss Sibby, excitedly. "There ain't but one thing to be done! You are a justice of the peace, and ought to know what that is! Here I lay a complaint, and lay before you the evidence that two young men are planning a breach of the peace that may end in murder or hanging, or the State prison, at the least, and you ask what's to be done! I'll tell you, then! Give out a warrant to take 'em both up, and fetch 'em before you, and make 'em give bonds to keep the peace, or else send 'em to prison! Let's you and me deal by our own young rascals just as we would by any other's. I make the complaint. You give out the warrant and haul 'em up for judgment. Now, I have done my duty. You do your'n!"

"But my poor Le! And he acts in vindication of my daughter!" sighed the squire.

"'Poor Le,' indeed! It would be poor Le if he was between the four walls of a jail, waiting of his trial for murder! Haul 'em up, squire! Haul 'em up! Make the two young wilyuns—as will break our hearts if you don't—give bonds to keep the peace! It's onpleasant, I know, but not half as onpleasant as murder and hanging.

"I suppose I must issue the warrants," sighed the squire.

"Well, then why don't you do it? Take time by the forelock, sez I. There ain't no time to lose, I tell you that! For, you know, though I interslipted the challenge, and my scamp took a blank in place of it, that

won't stop the duel; it will only put it off a little while; it will be fought, all the same, unless them young rascals of ours is took up!"

"I think Miss Sibby is right, squire. I see no way to prevent mischief, except by arresting the two young men and holding them in custody for a while. You need not send them to the common jail. You can keep them here," urged the rector.

"I will do it. There is not a constable nearer than Benedict. I do not like to trust the warrants to a servant to take to the officer, because I wish to give some private instruction with the instruments. You will excuse me, Dr. Peters, I hope, if I ride to town and leave you for a few hours? Mrs. Force and the girls will be happy to entertain you until my return."

"My dear friend, I was about to ask you to order my horse an hour ago, when the arrival of our good neighbor stopped me. It is absolutely necessary that I return to the rectory to meet an engagement this morning."

"Then we will ride together as far as our roads go in the same direction."

Mr. Force rang a bell, which was answered by the entrance of Jake.

"Saddle the rector's horse; also saddle Samson for me, and the brown horse for yourself. Bring them around to the side block. We shall have to ride to Benedict to-day."

The man bowed assent to his master's orders, and left the room.

"You will stay and spend the day with the ladies, I hope, Miss Sibby?" said Mr. Force.

"Well, I reckon I will—if you'll tell the man, when he comes back with the horses, to have my mule put in the stable and fed."

"Certainly."

"And now I'll just go and find the ladies. No, don't stir! I know where to find 'em, and I can denounce my-

self, too! I haven't any call to stand on ceremony, as if I was one of them upstarts as have got rich suddenly on spectoration! Not I!"

So, gathering up her riding skirt, the old lady left the office and went up the hall to the door on her right hand, where she stopped and rapped.

"Come in!" the gentle voice of Elfrida Force responded.

And Miss Sibby opened the door and entered the room, to be received with acclamation by Wynnette, Elva and Mrs. Anglesea, all of whom were present.

Meanwhile, Mr. Force, seated at his desk in his office, with Dr. Peters by his side, filled out two blank warrants for the arrest of Leonidas Force, of Greenbushes, and Roland Bayard, of Forest Rest.

By the time he had completed them, Jake appeared and announced that the horses were at the door.

"Very well. We shall be ready in a few minutes. Go and tell some one to take Miss Sibby Bayard's mule to the stable."

"I done put that beast up and fed it more 'an an hour ago, sah! I knowed Miss Sibby was going to stay all day, 'cause she allers does. So I 'tended to her animal right off."

"Quite right. Bring me my riding boots."

The servant did as he was bid, and the squire and his guest got ready for their ride.

On their way out to the hall door they stopped at Mrs. Force's parlor, to bid good-by to the ladies sitting there.

The rector gravely shook hands with every one.

Mr. Force merely nodded and smiled his adieus, and said that he should be back in the evening in time for tea.

Then the two gentlemen went out, mounted their horses and rode away, attended by the groom—the minister to his parochial duties, the squire to find an officer to serve his warrants.

## CHAPTER XXX

### THE BRIDEGROOM'S NEXT MOVE

MEANWHILE the two visitors in Mrs. Force's parlor had a pleasant time of it.

Mrs. Force, seeing that the gossip between Mrs. Anglesea and Miss Sibby Bayard would be sure to turn on the character and antecedents of the gallant Col. Angus Anglesea, and thinking that their discourse would not prove very edifying to her young daughters, sent Wynnette and Elva with a message to Miss Meeke, and gave them an intelligible hint that they need not return.

"You never let on a word to me that you was the wife of that man who was going to marry Odalite Force —no, not even when we was all a-talking about the wedding!" said Miss Sibby, reproachfully, before she had been many minutes seated in the parlor.

"Woman alive, I was afraid to tell anybody, for fear the secret would get out, and put him on his guard, and spoil my fun!" exclaimed the lady from Wild Cats'.

"How spoil your fun?"

"Why, this way—prevent me from doing what I wanted to do."

"What you wanted to do?"

"Yes!"

"And what was that? Anything more than stopping the wedding?"

"Yes, indeed! It would have stopped the wedding days before it did if I had let on to you, or to any one else, that he had a wife living, and I was she! Why, the very hint of the thing would have stopped the wedding! But I wanted to put him to a public shame, and make an example of him! I wanted to give him rope enough to hang himself. And to let him pile up wrath against the day of wrath! And so I laid low, and said noth-

ing to nobody until I found him at the altar, with the bride by his side, and then I denounced and disgraced him, in the great congregation of the people!"

Just at this moment a servant entered the room, and handed a note to Mrs. Force.

The lady changed color as she recognized the handwriting, and opened the envelope.

These were the contents:

"I have been waiting and watching for two days, with the patience of a determined man of set and immutable purpose, to get an opportunity for a private interview with you. The opportunity has now rewarded my vigilance. Meet me at once, in the house or out of it."

There was no signature.

Mrs. Force put the note into the fire, saw it blaze and consume in an instant, and then arose, saying to her guests:

"You will excuse me for a few moments?"

"You bet! I know a housekeeper has got to look after her help, I reckon, or there'd be fine doings. We weren't plagued with help at Wild Cats'—not much we weren't! But go along with you now!" said Mrs. Anglesea.

"Is it a bill? I hate bills! 'Specially when I haven't got the money to pay 'em, though I am descended from the Duke of——"

But Mrs. Force had gone to the door, passed out, closed it behind her, and was speaking to the man who had brought the note.

"Where is the gentleman who gave you this?"

"It was the colonel, ma'am," replied the man, in a low voice, as if conscious of naming an objectionable visitor; "and he is standing at the front door."

"Then bring him into the drawing room," she said, as she passed on and entered the place first.

She threw herself into a deep-cushioned chair by the fire, and covered her pale and quivering face with her hands.

A few moments passed, and Anglesea entered, closing the door behind him.

"Well, Friday!" he said, as he advanced and threw himself into a chair opposite to her at the fireside. "I have been watching the house, from the top of the hill, with a telescope in my hand, from morning until night for two days, waiting for a chance to speak to you alone."

"That must have been a great trial for a man of your good appetite and love of ease," replied the lady, with a curl of her lip.

"Not at all! I came out in a comfortable top buggy, which I drove myself, and brought a luncheon of cold ham and canvas-back duck and a flask of brandy. Tied the horse under a tree out of sight of the house, and stood where I could command a full view of the premises without being seen. All day yesterday, as long as it was light enough to see, I watched in vain. No one left the house, except the gallant, gay, young midshipman—the walking gentleman of this light comedy. So I went back to mine inn late at night, and much disappointed. This morning I was here very early, but waited until near noon before anything happened! Then I saw the squire and the rector ride forth together and take the road to Benedict. Then I made a descent upon the fort. So you have my Californian sweetheart staying with you?" he exclaimed, in a light and taunting manner.

"Sir!" said Elfrida Force, in a tone of haughty indignation.

"Oh, come now, Friday, you never really supposed that woman from Wild Cats' to be my wife! And, as for the lighter relationship, I need have no qualms in confessing it to you. A confidence of that kind could not shock you."

A crimson tide of shame and wrath swept over the lady's cheeks and brow, but she controlled her indignation, and kept silence.

"You have no idea how free and easy I feel in your society, Friday. With everybody I feel ill at ease, because I must play a part and seem other than I am. But with you I can be myself. With you I can speak of my *bonnes fortunes* as to a confidential friend."

"Col. Anglesea, if you are trying to cast reflection upon the good name of the worthy woman from California who is our guest, your labor is in vain. We know that she is your lawful wife," said Mrs. Force.

"You do! Then, by Jove, you know more than anybody else does!" he replied, with a laugh.

"We have received a telegram from the Rev. Dr. Minitree, of St. Sebastian, confirming the fact of your marriage with Mrs. Wright."

"Oh, you have? But suppose at the time of that frolicsome wedding with the Wild Cat widow I had a living wife in London?"

"Man!" cried Elfrida Force, in horror and amazement.

"Yet such was the fact. My wife, Lady Mary Anglesea, was living in London at the time of my marriage with Ann Maria, or Mary Ann Wright, or whoever she was. I have actually forgotten her true name."

"Oh, villain! villain! Your deviltry is unmatched in all the world!"

"Thanks. You do me no more than justice. And you must see by that I am quite worthy to be—your son-in-law; for, my dear Friday, that is what I am. I received the news of the death of my wife, Lady Mary Anglesea, while I was staying at Niagara, and just one week before the most auspicious day on which I met again my old 'pal' and her new family. So, when I married Odalite Force, I was perfectly free to contract lawful marriage, and so the same Odalite is now my lawful wife.

'Read, learn, ponder and inwardly digest' that fact, my lady, if you please."

"You make these statements in reckless bravado. I do not believe one word you say. Why should I believe anything merely upon your authority, when I know, from all experience, that you have not the slightest respect for the truth? You told a falsehood in the church. You said you had never been in California in all your life, and had never before set eyes on the woman who claimed to be your wife. Now, then!"

"I was taken utterly by surprise, as you know—shocked out of my usual self-possession. It was a false move to have denied all knowledge of the Wild Cat. I am ashamed of the false move, but not of the falsehood, in your presence. By the powers, madam! why should I be? I only tell a falsehood. You live one! But come. Don't let us go on complimenting each other in this absurd style. It is so very unprofitable. You do not believe the statement that I have made to you?"

"Why should I believe it merely upon your word?"

"You want proof?"

"I want nothing from you, Angus Anglesea, but your adieus. I should very much like to receive them."

"Really, Friday, you are very reckless. You are playing with edge tools, if you did but know it. Ah, well! I have only to give you proof of the power that I possess over your daughter Odalite to bring you to your knees, madam."

With these insolent words, the man drew a portmonnaie from his pocket, opened it, took out a slip cut from an English newspaper and handed it to her.

With a proud, disdainful smile she took it and read:

"Died.

"Suddenly, at Anglewood Manor, on August twenty-fifth, in the forty-ninth year of her age, Lady Mary,

eldest daughter of the late and sister of the present Earl of Middlemoor, and wife of Col. the Hon. Angus Anglesea, H.E.I.C.S."

She returned the slip to the man without a comment.

"Well, madam, what do you think of that?" he inquired.

"I think the poor lady most fortunate in her death, since it freed her from you."

"Thanks, very many. I have kept this little slip, not with the least idea, not with the faintest prevision, that I should ever have this need of it. Nor have I cherished it in tender memory of the dear departed. By no means. I have kept it to gloat over it, as a slave might over his 'free papers.' And I have gloated over the words that gave me liberty. 'Died'—'Lady Mary Anglesea.' What a pleasure it is to read over these words!"

"Oh! Oh!" groaned Elfrida Force, wringing her hands. "I think the worst punishment in hell must be the society of devils!"

"Ten thousand thanks, if that compliment is intended for me. It seems higher than my merits, but it shall be the aspiration of my life to live up to it," said the colonel, with a very low bow.

"Why have you demanded this interview with me? Why have you come here to torment me?" demanded the lady, wringing her hands.

"First of all, to show you, and to prove to you, the true relations in which I stand to your daughter."

"And of what avail will that be to you? You cannot claim our daughter as your wife without an open confession of having married the Widow Wright during the lifetime of your first wife, and thereby exposing yourself to prosecution for more than one crime, the least of which would send you to State prison—for bigamy, for forgery, for robbery. And do you think your California victim is of a temper and disposition to spare you,

when she finds out that she has been so criminally deceived—when she knows that you are not her husband? No! She will prosecute you to the utmost extent of the law. And, even if it were possible to suppose that she could forgive your black villainy, forget her own deep wrongs, and forego vengeance, do you suppose it possible that Abel Force would ever be brought to recognize your claim to his daughter? Never, you may depend on it! He will repudiate your claim as the most shameful insult to his family. He will protect his daughter against you with his life. If needful, he will seek a dissolution of this merely nominal ceremony of marriage in the proper courts of law. Why, Abel Force would see his daughter in her grave before he would see her sacrificed to a man publicly disgraced as you have been!"

"Quite so. I perfectly understand that. The situation would be exceedingly awkward in any light. So, my lady, I am not so mad as to come here to claim immediate possession of my wife. I came, as I said, to prove to you that I have a legal claim upon her; that I am her lawfully wedded husband; that she is my lawful wife. All this seems tautological, vainly repetitive; but, then, repetitions are really necessary to make an impression on some people—on yourself, as a matter of detail."

"Be as brief as possible, if you please," said the lady, much relieved by what he had just told her of his non-intention to put in any present claim to the possession of Odalite.

"I will. I shall leave this part of the country in a few hours, and depart for England within a few days. I really think it is the best course for me to pursue at present."

"I really think it is," put in the lady.

"Thanks. You really deserve my forbearance, and I shall spare you for the present, upon certain conditions. If these conditions be fulfilled, you are safe. If they be not, you are lost."

"Let me hear them. I am not at all sure that I shall not prefer to be lost," said the lady, whose spirits had risen under the prospect of her enemy's retreat from the neighborhood.

"Listen, then. I intrust you with the custody of my wife. You must always bear in mind that she belongs to me, and belongs to me until death; no less shall free her! I shall arrange to keep you both under espionage, even from the other side of the ocean. So long as you shall keep faith with me, I shall keep quiet, and patiently await the course of events that shall make my wife the countess of Enderby in her own right, and restore her to my arms. But, on the very sign of an intention to dissolve the bond that binds her to me, or to give her to any other, I shall—at all hazards to myself—swoop down upon you with a sudden destruction from which there shall be no appeal! Do you understand and accept the conditions?" he inquired.

"I understand and accept the conditions," said Mrs. Force, with firmness. "I shall certainly not encourage or countenance the thought of any other alliance for my daughter, although I pray Heaven that she may never live to set eyes on your face again!"

"Thank you! I feel sure that you will keep faith with me—not only from your high esteem and deep affection for me, but also from your own self-interest. I will not further intrude upon your time. Give my love to my wife, and—to my Californian sweetheart. Madam, I have the honor to bid you good-morning!"

Angus Anglesea left the room.

Elfrida Force went to the front window to watch him out of sight, and also to recover her own self-control.

Then she returned to her guests in the parlor.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### A FOOL'S ERRAND

When young Roland Bayard left the Forest Rest, with Leonidas Force's supposed challenge in his pocket and on warlike thoughts intent, he walked rapidly on toward the Calvert House, an old-fashioned and highly respectable roadside establishment, half farmhouse, half tavern, notable for its pure liquors, fine tobacco and rare game—in season. It was a favorite house of call for travelers on that road, and of sojourn to strangers who might be detained by business or by accident in the neighborhood. It was full four miles from Forest Rest, but, as young Roland owned no saddle horse, he had to walk all the way—no very great hardship, indeed, for a strong, young man on a fine winter night, when the moonlit sky and the snow-covered earth made the scene almost as clear as day.

Roland crunched along the little footpath leading through the wood to the highway, and then walked rapidly over the hard, frozen road—a very solitary road at that hour of the night. High woods flanked it on either side, opening occasionally, now on the right and now on the left, to show some farmhouse, with its barns, fields, gardens and orchards.

It was still early in the winter evening when he reached the Calvert.

It was a very quiet-looking place, a two-story double brick house, rough cast, with white stucco, and having four dormer windows in the front roof, nine long windows in the upper floor and eight on the lower—that is, four on each side of the entrance door. On the right hand side was the public parlor; on the left hand side the bar.

A buggy and two saddle horses before the door were the only signs of business about the place.

Roland went into the bar, and inquired if Col. Anglesea was in the house.

"No; he has not been in since morning," was the answer.

"When is he expected?" inquired Roland.

"Don't know; he said he might not return to-night."

Roland borrowed a newspaper, and sat down to while away a tedious evening.

People came in and went out, but as early as ten o'clock the barroom was nearly deserted.

"Do you think the colonel will be likely to return during the night—after the house is closed, for instance?" inquired Roland.

"Don't know at all. But, even if he should come in after we have shut up, there'll be somebody to let him in. Is the colonel a friend of yours?"

"Do you want to insult me?" demanded young Roland, firing up.

"Oh, no, not at all—no offense! I only asked because you seemed so anxious to see him," mildly pleaded the bartender.

"One may be anxious to see a fellow from other motives than friendship," said Roland, sulkily.

"So they may," conceded the barkeeper. "And ever since that rumpus in the church that broke up the wedding there's a good many people who are anxious to see the colonel out of curiosity."

"Ah, they want to see what the monster looks like who, having a living wife, tries to marry an heiress!"

"Yes; and I reckon that is why the colonel keeps pretty much out of the way. He came here the afternoon of the wedding day, before we had heard of the fuss at the church, and, though we wondered much to see the bridegroom here alone, we couldn't ask any questions. He engaged a room, and then hired a horse and buggy and went off. He hadn't been gone an hour before people began to come in and talk of the broken-

up wedding. We took in a great deal of money all the afternoon on account of people gathering here to talk and to hear about the affair. And toward night comes a cart from Mondreer, loaded with all the colonel's trunks, pistol cases, hat boxes, fowling pieces and what not. They were all taken up to his room, but the colonel did not come in until near midnight, and he went away again this morning before sunrise, leaving word that he might not be back to-night."

"Well, it is half-past ten, and he has not returned. I am waiting to see him on very important business, so I think I must take a bed here, and see my gentleman in the morning," Roland decided.

"All right," the barkeeper replied, and he rang a bell that brought a negro waiter to the counter.

"Show this gentleman into the front room over the parlor, and make him comfortable. Would you like a fire, sir?"

"Fire? No, of course not; thank you, all the same," laughed Roland, as he followed the negro man upstairs to the room assigned him.

Roland was wholesomely tired, for he had been traveling on horseback or on foot for nearly forty-eight hours; nevertheless, he waited up until he heard the house closed for the night. Then, when all the calling up and down stairs, the walking back and forth along the passages, the banging of doors and the clattering down of windows had ceased, and the lights were out and the premises were dark and quiet, Roland went to bed and went to sleep. He slept the sound, deep, dreamless sleep of youth, health and fatigue.

It was quite late in the morning when he awoke. The sun was gleaming in golden needles through the interstices of his window shutters.

For a moment he did not know where he was, or how he had come into the strange room. In another instant he recollected himself and his errand. He jumped out of

bed and threw open the window shutters. It was very cold, and there was no fire, and the water on the wash-stand had a thin layer of ice over it.

But Roland did not ring for a waiter to bring either fuel or hot water, for he was inured to hardships and accustomed to waiting on himself.

He broke the ice in his ewer, washed has face and hands, wiped and rubbed them with a coarse, crash towel until they shone and glowed, then put on his clothes, and hurried downstairs and into the bar.

There was no one in it at that hour but the bartender and a negro boy.

"Good-morning," said the former. "You are late this morning. Fatigued and overslept yourself, perhaps."

"Yes. Did Col. Anglesea return last night?"

"He did. He came in about an hour after the house was closed. Pete opened the door for him."

"And—where is he now? Can I see him at once, do you think?" eagerly inquired Roland.

"I don't suppose you can see him at once, for Heaven only knows where he is. He took breakfast at sunrise, and went off in a buggy, saying that he should not return to-night."

"Oh-h-h-h!" exclaimed Roland, with a perfect howl of disappointment. "And he has gone?"

"Yes, gone."

"Where? Where?"

"He did not say; so we do not know."

"When will he be back?"

"He said that he should not return to-night; further than that we do not know."

"Oh, why did you not have me called? Why did you not detain him and send for me?" demanded Roland, in the tone of a deeply injured individual.

"My dear fellow, I did not happen to see the colonel, or hear of him, until after he was gone. The head

waiter had charge of him, and gave the message he left for the house," mildly pleaded the bartender.

"Oh-h-h! what a disappointment!" cried Roland, leaving the bar to go in search of the head waiter.

He found that functionary in the public dining room, and questioned him closely in regard to the movements of Col. Anglesea; but the head waiter could only repeat the message left with him by the colonel; and this, of course, threw no new light on the subject.

Roland went out and questioned the hostler, but the latter knew even less than the others about the missing guest.

Finally Roland, in spite of his disappointment and anxiety, feeling the keen hunger of a healthy youth, went in and sat down and eat a very hearty breakfast.

Then he paid his bill and left the Calvert, leaving every one, from the host to "boots," wondering what on earth the young man could have wanted with the colonel, to have kept him waiting all night for him.

But, finally, some one remembered that Mr. Roland Bayard was mate of the ship which had brought the colonel's forsaken wife—his first wife, as they called her —from California to Maryland, and that the same Mr. Roland Bayard had escorted the lady to the neighborhood, and had even introduced her to his own aunt, the good Miss Sibby Bayard, who had entertained the stranger without knowing who she really was, or what the nature of her business in the neighborhood might be.

Therefore, the gossips and wiseacres of the Calvert decided that young Roland Bayard must be a messenger from "his first wife."

Roland, meanwhile, unmindful of the discussion he had left behind him, sturdily strode on his way over the frozen highroad, under the winter sky, toward Greenbushes, to report to Leonidas Force.

Greenbushes was full five miles from Calvert's, so he walked on.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### PREPARING FOR FATE

Leonidas Force, after leaving Forest Rest, put spurs to his horse and galloped all the way to Greenbushes, only pausing when it became necessary to open a gate that crossed the road, by which chance the hard-pressed steed got a moment in which to recover his wind.

When he reached Greenbushes, he sprang from his saddle, threw the bridle to a boy who came up to take the horse, and hurried into the house.

His colored housekeeper came to ask him if he was going to stay home all night, or to return to Mondreer, so that she might know whether she was to get supper, and to make a fire in his bedroom.

Le told her that he should stay at home all night.

The woman went away to attend to his comforts.

Le opened the door of that little, oak-paneled parlor on the right of the hall of entrance, where there was always a fire kept alive for the master, and a round table covered with account books, piles of paper, bundles of pens and bottles of ink.

Le threw off his riding coat, hat and gloves, drew off his boots, thrust his feet into slippers, and dropped into the large, leather armchair before the table, and laid his head upon his folded arms on its top.

Le was not the least of a coward. He knew no fear. Yet he fully realized the awful gravity of the situation in which he had voluntarily placed himself. His Christian conscience began to trouble him.

"Thou shalt not kill!" it whispered to him.

He tried not to hear it.

"The dastardly villain ought to be punished," he said to himself. "My uncle cannot call the beast out. He is a justice of the peace; he is a vestryman in the church;

he is a husband and a father. He cannot fight the monster! And he has no son to act for him! I am his nearest male relative, and I have no ties to bind me and keep me from doing a man's part in this matter; it seems my duty. I do not want to kill the wretch, though he deserves to die; I do not want to kill him! I think I would far rather he killed me! But I cannot help it! I must call him out, and he must take the risk! I must avenge Odalite!"

His conscience again spoke:

"Vengeance is mine, and I will repay, saith the Lord."

Luke, an old servant attached to the plantation, came in and laid fresh logs on the fire, and then went out again.

But Le, absorbed in his argument with his own conscience, never noticed the man's entrance or his exit.

"The die is cast now," he said, in conclusion, "and I must abide the issue. The challenge is sent. The scoundrel is a soldier, and he will accept it! I must meet him! And, if I kill him, I must take the consequences in this world and—in the next!"

Martha, the housekeeper, came in with a large tray on which she had arranged her master's supper. She set it down on a side table, while she removed the books and stationary from the center table and spread a white cloth over it. Then she set out his supper, and said:

"Do, please, young marster, try to eat somefin'. That racket at the church seems to hev upset yer so that yer look downright ill."

Le was feverish and thirsty, and he drank cup after cup of tea, nearly as fast as the housekeeper could pour it out. But he could not eat a morsel.

" 'Deed, I'm feared yer gwine to have some sort of a fever, young marster! 'Deed, I am!" said Martha, as she began to clear the table, after finding all her persuasions fruitless to induce the young man to eat.

When the woman was gone, Le replaced all the paper,

pens and ink upon the table again, and sat down, poor fellow, to write his "last will and testament."

It was very short and plain. He left all his real estate and personal property to his three dear cousins, Odalite, Wynnette and Elva, daughters of his dear relative, Abel Force, of Mondreer, share and share alike, subject only to some trifling legacies to old servants and to a bequest of ten thousand dollars to his dear friend Roland Bayard, of Forest Rest; and he constituted Abel Force and Roland Bayard joint executors.

Next he wrote farewell letters to his friends and relatives.

All this work kept him up long after midnight. When it was finished, he gathered all the documents together and took them with him up to his bedroom, and locked them in the upper drawers of his bureau.

Finally, with the guiltiest conscience, the darkest spirit and the heaviest heart that he had ever experienced in his young life, he laid himself down on his bed. He could not sleep, and he dared not pray. Never before had he laid down to rest without having prayed. But how could he pray now, when he was deliberately planning to break, and make others break, one of the most awful commandments in the decalogue?

So the boy lay awake through all the long and dreary night, waiting for the day. What would the day bring forth? Where would he be the next night?

"If it were only my life that was to be taken! Even if it were only my soul that was to be risked! But the awful fiat of the Most High to be broken! Purposely, deliberately broken! Oh, Heaven! how one man's sin makes many men's crimes!'

So thinking, so feeling, so suffering, Le passed the most miserable night of his whole life.

The gray light of the winter day dawned at last.

Then Le arose and slowly dressed himself.

Roland, he thought, would soon be with him, bringing

the acceptance of his challenge and the program of the hostile meeting.

Slowly he descended the stairs and entered the parlor.

Early as it was, the window shutters had been opened, the fire kindled and the room put in order.

Le threw up the window sash to inhale the fresh air. It was keen and cold this winter morning, yet refreshing to his fevered head.

The sun was up and shining from a clear, blue sky upon the snow-covered earth, and the forest of pine beyond, and the grove of cedars, spruce, firs and other evergreens near the house.

Le closed the window at length, and sat down to wait for the coming of Roland Bayard.

Old Luke came in with oak logs to replenish the fire.

"Mornin', young marster! Gettin' colder, ain't it? Shouldn't wonder ef de crik didn't froze ober 'fore night," he said, as he laid the logs carefully on the blazing brands.

Le assented, in a low voice, scarcely knowing what had been said to him, or what he said.

The man retired, and was succeeded by the woman, Martha, who came in to set the table for her master's breakfast.

"Mornin', Marse Le! Hope as yer feel better'n yer did las' night, dough, Lor' knows, now I look at yer, yer doan look any better; yer looks wuss. 'Deed, Marse Le, yer ought to 'sult a doctor," she said, as she opened the tablecloth and flirted it out to spread over the table, keeping her eyes on the young master all the time.

"I am not ill, Martha," he said.

"Ain't yer, now, Marse Le? Well, den, yer's gwine to be, dat's all," was the encouraging comment.

She brought in the breakfast, and spread it temptingly out on the table, a thankless task, for, as before, Le could not be persuaded to choke himself by attempting to swallow a morsel of solid food; but he drank cup after cup

full of strong coffee, as fast as the woman could pour it out.

"Kill yerself! 'Deed you will, Marse Le! Drinkin' so much strong coffee an' a-puckerin' ob yer stummick up, 'stead o' fillin' ob it out wid bread and meat! Kill yerse'f! 'Deed yer will!" said Martha, as at last she cleared the table and left the room.

"Yes, sah! Dere he is in de little parlor!" Le heard her say, as she passed through the hall, to some one at the front door.

And in another moment the room door was thrown open, and Roland Bayard appeared.

"Well?" demanded Le, excitedly, as he started up to meet his friend.

"Well, I can't find the sneak! I believe he has cut and run, that's what I believe!" exclaimed Roland, snatching his hat from his head, flinging it angrily on the floor, and throwing himself into a chair.

"What!" cried Le, facing him.

"I say the beat has beat a retreat!"

"What do you mean?" inquired Le.

Then Roland, having recovered his breath, told Le the story of his fruitless adventure at the Calvert House.

"He keeps out of the way on purpose; but he shall not escape me!" exclaimed Le, drawing his breath hard.

"I only came to report to you and take orders for the next step," said Roland.

"He still retains his room at the Calvert?" inquired Le.

"Oh, yes! And all his effects are there."

"Then, dear boy, go back at once to the Calvert, and stay there until he returns, and then give him my note. Take up your lodgings at the house, if need be, until you discharge your mission," said Le.

"Yes—yes—certainly—with pleasure—but——"

"But what?"

"If you could lend me the loan of a strong pair of

boots, or, better still, a good saddle horse, it might help the cause a little," replied Roland, laughingly extending both his feet to exhibit his own battered "Wellingtons."

"What a beast I am!' cried Le, smiting his forehead with his open palm in self-disgust. "You have walked all this distance in my cause, while I have a dozen horses turning to stone for want of exercise in the stables there."

And he snatched up an iron hand bell, that might have served for a country church or a steamboat, and rang it loudly.

Old Luke put in his gray head at the door.

"Saddle Jasper for Mr. Bayard, and bring him around to the door."

"Yes, sah! Yere's two ge'men axing for yer, Marse Le," said the old man.

"Two gentlemen? Who are they? Let them come in," said Le.

And, even as he spoke, two men entered the parlor, and, each laying a hand on the shoulder of the youth, said:

"You are my prisoner! Yield quietly. It will be best."

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## CHAPTER XXXIII

### THE ARREST

Leonidas Force and Roland Bayard indignantly threw off the detaining hands, and stared haughtily at their captors.

"Take it easy, young gentlemen, and you shall be treated as such," said old Tom Bowen, a grave, gray-haired, most respectable old man, an elder in the church and county constable for many years.

" 'Take it easy!' Take what easy? If it were not for

your age and piety, I should think you were drunk or crazy, Mr. Bowen! What is the meaning of all this, anyhow?" demanded Leonidas.

"Oh, don't you see it's all a funny mistake, Force? They have waked up the wrong passengers. They are after some other parties. The thieves that stole Tom Grandiere's young horse, I reckon. But, great Neptune! do we look like horse thieves? Say! Who are you wanting, anyhow, you blooming boys?" demanded Roland, in all sincerity.

The two constables sat down, and "Old Bowen," as he was always called, deliberately drew from his capacious pocket a formidable-looking document, which he unfolded, saying:

"I hold here a warrant issued by Abel Force, Esq., of Mondreer, justice of the peace for the county, commanding me to arrest and bring before him the body of Leonidas Force, of Greenbushes, to answer the charge of a breach of the peace by sending a challenge to fight a duel to one Col. Anglesea, at present a resident of this county. You can take my warrant in your own hands and read it with your own eyes, if you wish to do so, young gentleman," said the mild, old officer, handing the verbose document to which he so briefly referred to the midshipman.

Le took it mechanically, and stared at it without reading a line. He was simply amazed at the event, and wondering with all his might how the carefully guarded secret of his sending the challenge to the colonel at the Calvert Hotel could have become known to Squire Force, at Mondreer.

Meanwhile, the old constable was not idle. He drew from that deep receptacle, his riding-coat pocket, a second document, which he unfolded and handed to Roland Bayard, saying:

"There, sir, is a warrant for your arrest upon very much the same sort of charge—a breach of the peace in

taking a challenge from Mr. Leonidas Force to Col. Angus Anglesea. You also can read it, if you wish."

"But I never delivered the challenge," said Roland, laughing at what seemed to him to be a solemn farce. "I never got a chance to deliver it. It is in my pocket at this moment. But I reckon it better not stay there, to rise up in judgment against us," he added, *sotto voce,* as he arose, went to the fire, drew the white paper torpedo from his vest pocket and dropped it into the flames, where it was instantly burned to ashes.

The constables did not attempt to prevent this destruction. Probably they did not even notice the act. Indeed, the second officer, a dull-looking young man, with a red head and freckled face, did not seem to take any part in the business of the hour.

"Now, then, you see what I have got to do. I have got to do, and 'fail not at my peril,' mind you. Though what peril I should risk in not executing of a warrant is more than I know, long as I have been in the county's service; and very few warrants have I ever had to serve, and that's a fact; and very sorry I am to have to do this, moreover."

"You must do your duty, Mr. Bowen. Neither I nor my friend here will offer any further opposition to it," said Le, good-humoredly. Then, turning to his companion, he added, sorrowfully:

"Oh, Roland, good, old boy, I am so cut up at the thought of having got you into this mess!"

"Don't turn into a blooming idiot, Le. I am glad to be with you in everything. You know it," said Roland, heartily.

"I do know it!" exclaimed Le, pressing his friend's hand.

"Oh, see these boys!" sighed the old man; "these boys I have known ever since they wore short jackets and check ap'ons! But don't fret, lads. 'Twon't go hard with you. And it's a heap better, anyhow, than if you'd

been left to your own devices to-day, and fought your duel and killed your man, and had to be arrested for murder to-morrow. Now, that might o' been serious."

"But there was a good chance that I might have been killed myself," suggested Le.

"D'y' call that 'a good chance'? Oh, you misguided young man!" cried the elder. "To be hurried into the presence of your Maker with murder in your heart! But I won't lecture, Mr. Le. I will leave that to the squire. He can, and I reckon he will. Now, then, young gentlemen, maybe we had better be moving. There is a carriage at the door—a most comfortable close carriage—sent by the squire himself. Ah, he had a care for you both, the good squire had. 'Do your necessary duty as kindly as you can, Bowen,' says he to me, he says, after he had put the papers in my hands with his own, and explained what I was to do. And I answered: 'Squire, do you think being county constable for nigh on to fifty years has made a brute beast of old Tom Bowen? Do you suppose that I could handle harsh the two lads I've knowed since they wore check ap'ons? The one lad as growed up in your house? And the other lad as I helped to resky myself when the schooner *Blue Bird* was wrecked on the shore? But there! It's no use talking. People say I'm getting too old for my office. Well, let 'em. I mean to hold on to it as long as I can read a warrant or ride a horse. If only to pervent some one taking my place who will be hard on skipple-skapple young uns like you."

"Mr. Bowen, you have had a long ride. Won't you take some home-brewed beer and bread and cheese before you go?" inquired Le.

The dull young man of the red head and freckled face looked up expectantly, but the old constable shook his head, and answered, solemnly:

"No, Mr. Leonidas; not when on duty. No, sir. If

I did, there be some who would say I was taking a bribe."

The dull young man of the red head and freckled face dropped his head and looked disappointed.

Leonidas and Roland had by this time put on their overcoats, drawn on their gloves and taken up their hats.

They now said that they were ready to go.

"Come, Bill. Have you gone to sleep there?" inquired the old man of his dull comrade.

The latter got up slowly from his seat, and the little party left the room.

Luke was in the hall, and opened the outer door.

"We are going out on business, Luke, and I shall not be home before night," said Le.

The old servant bowed, without the least suspicion of what the nature of that business could be.

The party left the house, entered the carriage, the young officer mounting the box, and the elder riding inside with the young men; and they took the road to Mondreer—the same pleasant road through the pine woods and across Chincapin Creek Bridge, that Le and his cousins had so often traveled on foot, or horseback, or in a carriage.

It was but half an hour's ride, and at the end of that time they drew up before the door of Mondreer.

Old Bowen alighted first; Leonidas and Roland followed.

"You drive the carriage round to the stable, and keep it there for us to go back to town in," said the old officer to the younger one, who was on the box. "And keep a still tongue in your head, mind you!" he added, in a whisper, to his subordinate, who nodded, and drove off toward the stables.

Old Jake met the party at the door, and said:

"Marster wishes you ge'men to walk right on inter de liberary; and dis is de way," he added, with a bow and

a flourish of his arm, as he walked on before and opened the door leading into the rear room, which was Mr. Force's sanctum.

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## CHAPTER XXXIV

### BEFORE THE SQUIRE

Mr. Force was seated in his leathern chair before a large, open fire, and beside a round table covered with books and stationery.

The squire, with his surroundings, looked as little like a magistrate in his office as could be well imagined.

Nor was his greeting of the prisoners at all magisterial.

Both young gentlemen bowed very gravely on entering his presence.

But he arose from his chair and shook hands with each in turn, with a kindly:

"Good-morning, Mr. Bayard! Good-morning, Le! Take chairs, both of you."

The young men bowed again, and obeyed.

There was a short pause, during which the squire reseated himself, and took up a paper which lay on the table beside him, scanned it, and said:

"Here is a most serious charge laid against both of you, young gentlemen—a charge of so grave a nature, indeed, as to compel me, in my character as justice of the peace, to have you arrested and brought here to be dealt with according to the laws you have broken."

"What is the charge, sir, who has made it, and what evidence has our accuser?" inquired Leonidas Force, with some youthful dignity.

"You shall hear," said the squire, and he rang a hand bell on his table, which quickly brought Jake to his presence.

"Go to the parlor and ask Miss Bayard if she will be so kind as to step in here," he said.

The old negro bowed and withdrew.

"By the holy poker, Aunt Sibby heard us yesterday!" whispered Roland to Leonidas.

"I suppose she did; that solves the mystery. But to think of her giving information!" replied Le, in the same low tone.

Miss Sibby entered the room, and closed the door behind her.

"Oh, you are here, you young varmints, are you? And you may thank me that you're up for a simple breach of the peace, instead of for murder, so you may!" she said, as soon as she saw the two young men.

Leonidas bowed and smiled.

Roland laughed, and, rising, gave her his own chair, and then stood up against the corner of the mantelpiece, since there was no other chair in the office.

She seated herself, with a look of determination to do her duty.

The squire took up the New Testament, and, handing it toward the old lady, said:

"Miss Bayard, will you take the usual oath, and then state what you know of this case?"

"No, I won't take no oath, because I won't break the command of Him who said, 'Swear not at all,' but I will make an afformation."

And she lifted her withered hand and made a most solemn affirmation that she would speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, to the best of her knowledge and belief, concerning them young tigers and the duel they were planning to fight.

And, having done this, she cleared her throat and began her story.

Leonidas arose from his chair, and went and stood by the side of Roland, and while their accuser gave in her

evidence they nudged each other and laughed to themselves like a couple of schoolboys.

"Well, squire, it was yesterday afternoon, and me and Roland was in the house together, for he had just come home from Port Tobacco after going to send that telegram to that parson 'way out yonder and waiting to get an answer 'bout the marriage out there. You know, squire."

"Yes, I know. Proceed."

"Well, while we was talkin'—me and Roland—up rides that young panther there," she said, pointing to Le, who kissed his hand to her for the compliment.

"And my scamp—him there," pointing to Roland, who bowed and smiled, "saw the horse and rider through the window, and rushed out to meet the wisiter and shut the door after him; but he didn't shut it tight enough, and so it came ajar, and the draught come through on my back, and chilled me, and I'm so subject to lumbago that I can't stand a draught on my back. You know, squire."

Mr. Force merely nodded, and the witness continued:

"So I ups and goes to call them boys in out'n the cold, and to shut the door. And then I seen Mr. Le—him there—sitting in his saddle and bending down, talking werry fierce-like to Roland. And Roland—him there—listening as grim as a meat ax. And I says to myself, when two or three of them boys is gathered together, sez I, it ain't the Lord, but the devil, that's in the midst of them, sez I. And you know it, squire."

Mr. Force grunted, in a non-committal sort of way, and the witness continued:

"So I just off with the table cover, and wrapped it round my head and shoulders, and I listened through the little opening of the door. I couldn't hear much, 'cause the wind was blustering, and most of what I did hear was bad words—like—well, 'scown-der-awl,' and such. You know, squire."

Mr. Force nodded.

"But at last I heard something as pretty nigh made my hair rise right up and lift the table cover offen my head. And it certainly did make ice water trickle all down my backbone! And this is what I heard: 'To fight a duel, or to do a murder!' Yes, squire, that was what them two young hyenas was a-planning—them two there, standing by the mantelpiece!"

The two young men bowed to the compliment, and the witness went on:

"Them was the only connected words I heard. And I heard them, 'cause they was said in such a grim, gritty way there was no preventing me from hearing of 'em. But, still, I made out as Roland—him there, a-grinning like a tomfool—was to carry a challenge from Leonidas Force—him there, a-winking like a magpie as has just hid a thimble—to Col. Anglesea, at the Calvert House. And then Mr. Leonidas rode away, and Roland ran into the house so sudden he almost tumbled over me. Yes, you did, you young rhine-horse-o-rus!" she added, shaking her finger at Roland, who dropped his eyes and smote his breast in mock penitence.

"Well, squire, you may be sure as I never let on to my young gentleman as I knowed anything about what he was up to. It wouldn't have done no good, you see. But I watched him. He carried a folded paper in his hand, like a letter, and he put it on the mantelpiece, and went upstairs, a-saying as he was going out; that I mustn't wait tea for him, as he mightn't be home till late. And soon's ever he was gone, I ups and takes that letter. The hungwallop was stuck together werry slight, and I opened it easy, without tearing, and took out the sheet of note paper, and read it. Lord, if all my skin didn't go into goose flesh! Of all the bloody-minded, murderous notes as ever was wrote But you saw it, squire. You know!"

"Yes," said Mr. Force, taking up a little piece of folded paper and holding it in readiness.

"Why, she intercepted the challenge! I remember I thought the letter felt rather thin when I took it from the mantelpiece, but I had not the faintest suspicion that it had been tampered with, and never gave the matter a second thought. Yet she had intercepted the challenge," said Roland, in a low tone.

But Miss Sibby overheard him, and answered:

"Yes, you young tiger I did interslip it! And, if I hadn't interslipted it, there'd 'a' been murder done, and the constable would have slipted a pair of handcuffs on your wrists by this time—and both of you in jail for murder! Yes, I mean you two young wolves in sheep's clothing, a-standing up by the mantelpiece there and a-grinning like apes!"

"She'll exhaust the menagerie on us presently," said Le.

"Have you any more to tell us of this case?" inquired Mr. Force.

"Well, not much, squire. I tore off the challenge neat as anything, and folded up the blank leaf in its own folds and put it back in the hungwallop, and gummed it up all nice as wax, and nicer, too; and then my scamp come down in his Sunday clothes, and took it up quick and put it in his pocket, and off with him, without any suspicion that he was a-carrying away a blank and a-leaving the challenge in my hands!"

"If you had wished to stop the duel, why hadn't you thrown the whole letter into the fire?" demanded Roland.

"Because, my fine, young chanticleer, you'd a-gone right straight off to Greenbushes and got another one writ, and took it to the colonel right off. Whereas, my letting you go on a fool's errand give me time and chance to come to the squire and fetch the evidence along with me. And, as it was too late to start that night, and I

knowed you couldn't fight the duel till to-day noways, I waited until this morning, and I got up and eat my breakfast by candlelight, and set off on my old mule for this place afore sunrise. And I made the complaint to the squire here, and give him the evidence, and called on him to make out a warrant and have you both took up and fetched here, to answer for your misdeeds, and to be dealt with according to law. And he did what I required on him, which was no more than his duty, if you had been his own dear sons. And here you are! Yes, you two there, standing agin' the mantelpiece! It is bad enough, the Lord knows, sez I. But it is not so bad as murder and hanging, sez I, nor yet the State prison, and working in chains! There, squire, I think that is all I have got to say about this, and may the Lord have mercy on their souls!"

"One moment," said the squire, handing over the intercepted challenge. "Is this the written paper that you took out from the envelope directed to Col. Anglesea and left by Mr. Bayard on your mantelpiece?"

"Why, to be sure it is!" said Miss Sibby, as she took it into her hand and examined it.

"That will do! Leonidas Force, come forward."

Le stepped up to the table.

"Are you the writer of this challenge, directed to Col. Anglesea, and bearing your signature?" queried Mr. Force, passing over the document in question to the young man.

"Yes, sir, I am the author of that challenge," said Le, after a glance at the paper.

"You have heard the charge laid against you. What have you to say in defense?" questioned the squire.

"Nothing. The charge is substantially true, barring the bad names with which the witness has complimented me. I deny that I am a 'warmint,' a 'wild cat,' a 'wolf,' a 'tiger,' a 'panther' or a 'rhine-horse-o-rus,'" said Le,

laughing; "but I wrote the challenge, and I intended to fight the duel."

"You admit this?"

"Entirely."

"That will do. Sit down."

Le dropped into the only vacant chair, and awaited the next move.

"Roland Bayard, come forward," said the squire.

The young man came, and stood respectfully before the squire.

"You have heard the charges made against you?"

"Yes, sir."

"What have you to say in defense?"

"Nothing, except in some sort what my fellow prisoner there has said. In a word, I may be, as Darwin says, remotely descended from a monkey, but I certainly must decline identity, or even relationship, to the wild beasts with which my good aunt has confounded me. But I did undertake to deliver a challenge from my friend Mr. Leonidas Force to that caitiff Angus Anglesea, and I did intend to be my friend's second in the duel."

"You admit all this?"

"I do."

"Leonidas Force, come forward."

The young midshipman stepped up and stood beside his friend, both facing the squire.

And then Mr. Force began, in the most earnest and solemn manner, to speak to them of the sin and evil of dueling; of the falsehood and insanity of calling such a crime an "affair of honor," when, in truth, it was a matter of dishonor. The very highest concern of a true man of honor is to keep the law of God, which the duelist breaks; and to keep the law of the land, which the duelist breaks. The duelist may have many motives, but "honor" cannot be one of them! A bully will fight a duel, upon occasion, to prove himself a man of brute

courage, and kill or be killed for so low a cause. A coward will fight a duel, because he is afraid to refuse, on account of what bullies might say of him, and kill, or be killed, from so mean a motive. A man maddened by wrongs, and raging with wrath, will fight a duel to be revenged upon his adversary, to slay or to be slain, and is eager to risk his own life, in the hope of taking his enemy's. But no man ever fought a duel from any motive of pure honor. There is no honor in breaking the laws of the Lord, or the laws of the land, but rather dishonor.

"You, Leonidas Force," said the squire, coming down from generalities to point his moral in a personality, and very gravely addressing his young relative, "you, in sending your challenge to Col. Anglesea to meet you in the duel, were inspired by the spirit of wrath and revenge. In your fierce anger you were not alone. Many shared that madness with you. Neither you nor they could help feeling a frenzy of indignation against the perpetrator of outrageous wrongs. But, though you could not help feeling this frenzy of anger, you could help sinning. You should have remembered the Word of God, 'Be ye angry, but sin not.' 'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord,' and, above all, the awful command, 'Thou shalt do no murder.' What! shall a man break these laws, and call it honor? An infidel may, perhaps; but even an infidel, who denies the Word of God, is amenable to the laws of the land, which equally forbid the illegal taking of human life; and even an infidel cannot fight a duel and truthfully call his crime 'an affair of honor.'

"I have tried to show you the criminal insanity of dueling, and now I will ask you to consider its consequences—as a case in point, the consequences to you two young men, had you succeeded in your unlawful design to fight this duel with Anglesea. You, Le, might have been killed. You would probably have fallen dead at

the first fire, for Anglesea is a sure shot, and as vindictive as Satan, and he would have aimed at your heart. You would have dropped dead on the field. Anglesea would have promptly made his escape. But your friend here would have been arrested and held as an accessory to your murder. He would have languished many months in jail, then been brought to trial—the long and tedious trial of the present age—perhaps through many trials, appealed from court to court; perhaps, after months or years of imprisonment and suspense, he might be finally acquitted, or—sent to the State prison.

"Then, on the other hand, by the chances of war, you might, instead of being killed yourself, have killed your adversary, in which contingency, Leonidas, your fate would have been far worse. You, Le, would have been arrested for murder, and would have been thrown into prison without bail. The same tedious imprisonment and repeated trials would have been your fate; you might have escaped the worst verdict, but you would certainly have been convicted of manslaughter and sent to the State prison, for you were the challenger, which was an aggravation of the offense.

"But I will dwell no longer on the probable consequences of your meditated deed. You were, no doubt, prepared to meet all the contingencies, to bear all the penalties. I will drop that part of the subject, and only revert to the first great argument against dueling—its flagrant disregard and defiance of the laws of God and man.

"And now, Leonidas Force, I shall require you to give bonds to the amount of ten thousand dollars to keep the peace."

"Will you receive my own for that sum, sir?" inquired the young man.

"Certainly," said the squire. And then, turning to the second offender, he said:

"Mr. Roland Bayard, I shall require you to give bonds for one thousand dollars to keep the peace."

"The Lord only knows where I am to pick up that sum. I reckon you'll have to send me to prison in default of bail, squire."

"No, you needn't, squire. I'm assessed for fourteen thousand dollars, and so I reckon you may take me as his bail for one thousand, mayn't you?" inquired Miss Sibby, rising from her chair and leaning over the table.

"Certainly," replied Mr. Force.

The good magistrate had so little call to exercise his office in his peaceful neighborhood that he never required the services of a clerk, and did not possess one. He quickly drew up the necessary papers, had them signed and sealed, locked them in his desk, and discharged the prisoners in a very unmagisterial manner.

"And now, my young friends, let us forget this unpleasant scene, while you both stay and dine with us."

And they stayed.

## CHAPTER XXXV

### YOUNG DR. INGLE'S NEWS

"Go, now, young gentlemen, into Mrs. Force's sitting room, and pay your respects to the ladies there. They know nothing whatever of the affair that brought you here to-day; nor do I wish them to know it. You are our guests for the day. That is all," said the squire, in dismissing the youths.

Then, turning to the old lady, he said:

"I cannot express to you, Miss Bayard, the obligation I feel under for your wise and prompt action in this matter. But for you much misery might have ensued."

"Lord, squire, I did no more than what might have been expected of me—one of my descent!" complacently

replied Miss Sibby, as she bowed and sailed out of the office.

"To be sure! To be sure!" assented the amiable master of Mondreer.

"I wonder," whispered Leonidas Force, as he linked his arm in that of Roland Bayard, and they passed along the hall together, "I do wonder if it is characteristic of a lady of high descent to open the envelope of a letter left on her mantelpiece and take out the letter? I wonder, further, if it were not a breach of the law, and what the lawyers call 'actionable'?"

"I think not," laughed Roland. "She acted in the cause of law, peace and justice. I don't think you could get any judge, jury, or even country magistrate, to see it in any other light."

They had now reached Mrs. Force's sitting room, where, as soon as they entered, they were received with the warmest welcome by all the family and guests there assembled.

Miss Sibby had already resumed her seat in the most comfortable armchair the room could boast.

There were present Mrs. Force, Mrs. Anglesea, Miss Bayard and the two little girls, who had just come in.

Odalite was not there.

"Come here, my fine, young sailor lad! I haven't seen sight of you since the rumpus in the church! Wasn't that a circus? Come here and sit by me!" said the lady from Wild Cats', making room on the sofa for Roland Bayard, who, with a smile and a bow, immediately placed himself beside her.

What else could a gentleman do?

"How is Odalite, auntie, dear?" inquired Le, seating himself just behind Mrs. Force's chair, and leaning over its back.

"She is much better and brighter than she has been for many weeks past," replied the lady.

"Indeed! I am very glad to hear it, auntie! There is

something about Odalite that I cannot understand. I came home finding her engaged to be married, of her own free will, and yet utterly wretched—wretched to the verge of madness! And now that the wedding has been publicly broken off in a manner reflecting the deepest disgrace upon the bridegroom, you say she is brighter and happier than she has been for many weeks," said Le, in a very low voice, still leaning over the back of the lady's chair and speaking in her ear.

"Yes, she is so; but hush, dear boy! This is not the place to discuss Odalite. Besides, it is not polite to whisper in company," said Mrs. Force, with a smile at the quoted commonplace.

Le lifted his head, and took his elbows off the lady's chair, only to see his two young cousins, Wynnette and Elva, standing on each side of him.

He caught them both, the one in his right arm, the other in his left, and drew them to his side.

"We are so glad you have come back, Le! We missed you so awfully yesterday—Wynnette and I did!" said Elva.

"Yes, the house was as dull as ditch water—I mean the mansion was excessively melancholy!" added Wynnette.

"I am sorry to hear that! And all on account of my absence?" laughingly inquired Leonidas.

"Largely, at any rate."

"My darlings," said Mrs. Force, "I thought you were in the schoolroom, busy with Miss Meeke in dressing dolls for the Sunday school Christmas tree."

"So we were, mamma, but Dr. Ingle came, and we all went down into the drawing room to see him," replied Elva.

"He always does cry for her—I mean inquire for Miss Meeke—and she always goes down to see him, and makes us go down with her. And he doesn't like it at all, and neither do we. Why, the other evening, when he came

just after tea, when you had a headache and Odalite was sitting with you, and we were in the drawing room with Miss Meeke, after a little while, he said:

" 'Do you not think that it is very unhealthy for children to sit up so late?'

"And she laughed and said:

" 'Their regular bedtime is nine o'clock. It is not yet seven.'

"And it is always so. He always looks at us as if he was saying to himself:

" 'Two is company,
Four is trumpery.'

"But this time, thank goodness, we happened to hear Le's voice in the hall, and we skedaddled—I mean we left the drawing room and came in here, mamma, dear," said Wynnette.

"What did Ingle talk about, or find to talk about, while you two were hanging around him like a wet blanket?" inquired Le, who often amused himself at Wynnette's expense.

"Oh, not much. He couldn't make love to Nat right before our four looking eyes—I mean he couldn't pay his addresses to Miss Meeke in our presence. Neither could he talk to Nat about old Col. Notley's gout, or old Mrs. Gouph's dropsy, like he does to mamma—I mean he could not discuss medical science with Miss Meeke as he might with a matronly lady. And so there wasn't much to talk about," said Wynnette.

"Oh, don't you remember, he said that Col. Anglesea had gone?" inquired Elva.

"Gone!" echoed Le and Mrs. Force, in one voice.

"Oh, yes!" replied Wynnette. "The horrid beat has made tracks—vamoosed the ranche—absquatulated—that is to say, Col Anglesea, H.E.I.C.S., and all the rest of it, has taken his final departure."

"Thank Heaven!" earnestly breathed Mrs. Force. "But is it certain, Wynnette?" she almost immediately inquired.

"I think so. Dr. Ingle met him, in traveling dress, at the railway station, when he took a through ticket to Washington, and said that he was en route for New York, and meant to sail on the *Scotia* for Liverpool next Saturday. His trumpery was to be sent after him by to-night's express."

"Thank Heaven!" again fervently breathed Elfrida Force.

"What's all that you're talking about over there?" inquired the lady from the mines, rising from her seat on the sofa and unceremoniously joining the group around her hostess. "What's up now? I heard the name of my fine scamp mentioned just now! Has anything happened to him? Has he broken his neck, eh?"

"Oh, no!" sighed Wynnette, in a tone of regret; "he has not broken his neck. Fate reserves that for the hangman to do! He has only left the neighborhood to return to England. But let us hope that the ship may be lost! I'm sure his presence on board will be enough to raise the demon and sink the ship!"

"Oh, Wynnette! Don't say such dreadfully wicked things! You don't mean them at all, you know you don't! Consider how many good people would be drowned if the ship should sink! And how many people would grieve all their lives after them!" said little Elva.

"Well, I'll take that back again! I know I do talk too much with my mouth—I mean speak without mature consideration," said Wynnette.

"So my scamp has gone back to England, has he? I wonder if he will try to marry a dook's darter? Or a markiss' widder? He's got cheek enough for anything! I declare, I ought to follow him up, to keep him out of mischief! I mean, of course, out of doing other folks mischief! I don't care a snap of my finger how much

mischief he does himself! The more, the better, sez I! But I ought to go for him to prevent him from preying upon other people! And I would, too, if I had money enough! 'Pon my word, I'm a great mind to go to New York and try to get a place as stewardess on one of the ocean steamers, so as to go after him! I'll think of it, anyway."

The conversation was interrupted by the opening of the door and the entrance of Miss Meeke, followed by Dr. Ingle.

There was a pretty flush on the usually pale cheeks of the young governess, and some little embarrassment in her manner, which was almost unnoticed, however, in the cordial greeting that was given to the young physician by all the family and guests in the room, and with all of whom he was acquainted, excepting only the lady from the California mines, to whom Mrs. Force duly presented him, and by whom he was received with gushing welcome.

"Sit right down here on the sofa by me, doctor! I dare say you have heard a deal of reports about me, and now I'm gwine to tell you the truth about myself, so that you can get it pure and fresh from first quarters!"

And, having found a new auditor, the lady from Wild Cats' began the story of her life, and talked on until the dinner was announced. That stopped her.

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## CHAPTER XXXVI

### LE AND HIS "UNCLE"

"COME into the library with me, my dear boy, I want to have a private talk with you," said Mr. Force, some hours later in the afternoon, as he led the way into his little sanctum in the rear of the hall.

The guests had all left the house. Miss Sibby had ridden off on her mule; the young doctor had ambled away on his cob, and Roland had set out to walk to Forest Rest.

But when we say the guests had all gone, we except, of course, the permanent visitor, the lively lady from California. She was still in the house, and likely to continue there.

"Le, my dear boy," said Mr. Force, as soon as the two were seated in the library, "I want you to give me your word of honor that you will never send a challenge, or accept a challenge, to fight a duel as long as you live."

"Uncle Abel, I give you my word of honor, with all my heart and soul in it, that I never will," earnestly and solemnly replied the young man.

"Thank you, my boy, thank you! Give me your hand on it! There, you are my own dear lad again!"

"Uncle Abel, you must think very badly of me for my madness and folly."

"No, I do not, Le. No, I do not, dear lad. I know that your wrongs and your temptations were almost more than the spirit of man could bear, especially the spirit of a young man; and I thank the Heavenly Father that you have been saved from sin and delivered from danger!" gravely replied Abel Force, reverently bowing his head.

"Uncle, I wish to make a full confession to you now—to open my soul to you, as if you were my father—as, in reality, you always have been in care and affection."

"Go on, dear lad. You can say nothing, I am sure, that I shall not be glad to hear."

"Well, then, Uncle Abel, I must tell you that after I had sent that challenge to Col. Anglesea I went home to Greenbushes and passed the most miserable night I ever spent in my whole life."

"I do not doubt it, lad."

"Heaven knows that it was not from cowardice——"

"Who ever accused, or dreamed of accusing, any Force of cowardice? We have no experimental knowledge of the meaning of that word," said Abel Force.

"No, we have not. It was not the thought of death, then, for I could meet death or deal death in the cause of duty. No; it was the foreshadowing of a great remorse. It began with the feeling that I could not, dared not, pray last night."

"Dear lad! But you can pray to-night, Le?"

"Yes; I can pray and give thanks to-night."

"And now you are my own dear son again, Le."

"Oh, Uncle Abel, if I might, indeed, be your son again! If I might be reinstated in the position, the happiness, I once enjoyed in my relations, present and prospective, with you and your family!"

"What do you mean, my dear Le? And yet I need not ask you, for I know."

"Odalite!" breathed the youth, in low, yet thrilling, tones.

"Ah, would to Heaven, my boy, that none had ever come between you!" sighed Abel Force.

"But the intruder has gone now, and left no trace behind."

"Ah, would to Heaven he had left no trace behind! But a heart like Odalite's does not easily recover from such a shock as she has sustained."

"I know. And yet I think she is already recovering. Pride, duty, honor, all will help her to recover. And of this I wish to speak to you, dear sir."

"Le, you have the most forgiving soul I ever met! Why should you take any further interest in your unhappy cousin?"

"Because I love her. And it is on this subject that I wish to speak to you. I am under sailing orders for the Pacific Coast, and——"

"Le! you under sailing orders? Why, I thought you were going to resign from the navy?"

"I should have resigned, if I could have married Odalite; but, as I could not, I did not."

"But, even so, I thought you were now entitled to three years home service?"

"So I was; but I could not rest after I thought I had lost Odalite, and so I applied for sailing orders on the week before Odalite was to have been married. I received them one hour ago. They came on the evening mail. If I had happened to be at Greenbushes, I should not have got the letter so soon, for, you know, my mail was always sent with yours, and I have never changed the address."

"And when do you go, Le?"

"I must join my ship at New York on the fourth of January. I must leave here on the second."

"The day after New Year's Day. That is very sudden."

"Yes; and I do regret it. If I had known—if I could have foreseen events—I should have carried out my first intentions, and resigned from the service, instead of applying for sailing orders; but now that I have applied, and have received them, I must go, much as I regret to do so. I must not seem to trifle with the department or shirk my duty."

"Certainly not, lad. And, under present circumstances, perhaps it is best that you go. You and Odalite are young, lad, and can well afford to wait a little longer. When you return from your voyage, Le, the disgraceful drama which has been enacted by this man Anglesea will have been forgotten. Odalite will have long recovered the shock to her spirit, and will be in a better condition to listen to a proposal from you, which it would be indiscreet, to say the least, for you to make her at present."

"I see that, sir; I feel it; and that reconciles me to the idea of going to sea again. The utmost favor I plead for now is that you will permit me to see Odalite, to have a private interview with her. I shall not wound her by

hinting at the hope hidden in the bottom of my heart—the hope of winning her hand some day; but I wish to ask her to correspond with me during my absence, as with a trusted relation or a true brother. Do you think, sir, that there can be any objection to my making such a request of my cousin?"

"None whatever, my dear boy. You have my fullest aprpoval of your course, and my warmest wishes for your success."

"Thank you, Uncle Abel."

"And we will yet hope that the dream of your love and of my ambition may be fulfilled in the union of yourself and Odalite in a happy marriage, and the consolidation of Mondreer and Greenbushes in one great manor."

"May Heaven grant it, Uncle Abel!"

"But, my boy, I wish you to speak to Odalite's mother also on this subject. She must be taken into our counsels."

"Oh, most certainly. I shall speak to Aunt Elfrida. But I wish to see Odalite first of all. I have not seen her since I saw her at the altar of All Faith Church on that broken wedding day. Why does she seclude herself so strictly? She is not indisposed. Aunt Elfrida told me she was better and brighter than she had been for many weeks. Why, then, does she keep her room?" inquired Le.

"I think, my dear lad, that she is indisposed, in one sense, at least—very much indisposed to meet a mixed company. She joined us yesterday both at dinner and at tea."

"But I was not here!" exclaimed Le.

"No, you were not here, or you would have seen her. To-day she has kept her room to avoid our visitors. It is a very natural reserve, under the circumstances, as you must admit, Le."

"Yes; but now they have all gone. Will she be in the parlor this evening, do you suppose?"

"No, my lad. I asked that question of her mother, who told me that Odalite was busily engaged and much interested in making things for the Sunday-school Christmas tree, and so would not come down this evening. But, Le, you may see her to-morrow morning. You will stay all night here, of course," said Mr. Force.

"I believe they will expect me home at Greenbushes to-night; but, after all, they are too much accustomed to my eccentric comings and goings to be the least uneasy at my absence; so I think I will please myself and stay, thank you, Uncle Abel," replied the youth.

"That is settled, then," said Mr. Force, as he arose to lead the way back to the drawing room.

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## CHAPTER XXXVII

### LEONIDAS AND ODALITE AGAIN

LEONIDAS arose on the morning of Christmas Eve with one thought predominant in his mind: He should see Odalite—see her for the first time since that eventful day when her marriage with Angus Anglesea was broken at the altar.

How would she appear? How would she receive him? Would she consider his friendly and most delicate advance an intrusion?

He could not answer this question to himself.

Was she really reconciled to her fate? Or was she only, from a sense of honor and of duty, repressing her emotions?

He could not judge.

Her mother had told him that she was better in health and brighter in spirits than she had been for many weeks.

Was this real or assumed on her part?

He did not know; but he felt sure that he should discover the truth when he should see her.

Now that the villain who had come between them was entirely out of the way—forever and forever out of the way—there need be no reserve, no false shows, between hearts which had never ceased to trust each other, though hers might have ceased to love.

Full of these anxious speculations, Le dressed himself and went downstairs to the parlor, where all the family and friends assembled before breakfast.

There he found them all, standing around the fire and chatting merrily while waiting for the bell to ring.

He gave them all a general good-morning as he entered the room.

And then he saw Odalite!

She separated herself from the group around the fire, came to meet him, placed both her hands in his, and—smiled!

The floors seemed to rock under Le's feet like the deck of a ship on the ocean, so great was his emotion.

Why, this was the first time he had seen her smile since he had returned from sea. And now she smiled frankly up in his face just as she used to do before he went away.

And, oh! to him that smile seemed the promise of all blessed possibilities in the future.

"Good-morning, Le!" she said, in the old, natural tone that he had not heard for three years. "We are just talking about having in the fiddlers to-night for the children to dance, and sending for little Rosemary Hedge and the Grandiere girls and boys, and your particular friend, Roland Bayard. But, Le, we will have to send the break all around to collect them to-day. Will you go, Le?"

"Go—go!" said Le, a little confused by his surprise and delight at seeing Odalite so cheerful. "Go—I

will go anywhere in this world, or do anything on earth you wish, Odalite!'

"That's my Le! I knew you would! So, now, dear father," she said, turning to Mr. Force, "you need not go in person, nor send a servant on such a very delicate errand as an impromptu invitation!"

"It is sudden," admitted Le.

"Oh, yes! You see, the poor, dear children, always have had their Christmas Eve dance as long back as they can remember, and their friends were always invited several days beforehand; but this year, on account—of the late disturbance, Le—there! I will not allude to it again—nothing was said about the dance until this morning, when I proposed it."

"You, Odalite?"

"Yes, I! Why should the dear children not have their annual dance? But it is so sudden, Le, and some people—as a mere matter of detail, the Grandieres—are such sticklers for etiquette that they might choose to consider an impromptu invitation an impertinence unless it was given in the most particular manner—as by a member of the family going in person to fetch the invited guests. You understand?"

"Yes, I understand," said Le, smiling broadly with delight.

The sound of the breakfast bell put an end to the conversation, and the whole party filed away to the breakfast table.

Immediately after breakfast Le set out in the "break"—a large, capacious, covered cart, or carriage, capable of holding a dozen people, and drawn by two strong draft horses.

Odalite mingled freely with the family that day, taking part in all the preparations for the evening dance, and entering with ready interest into all the children's schemes of enjoyment.

"Oh, isn't it jolly to have the house all to ourselves!"

exclaimed Wynnette, who, mounted on the top of a step-ladder, was engaged in twining the mistletoe in and out among the branches of the chandelier that hung from the center of the ceiling. "It is awfully jolly—I mean it is truly comfortable—to have that scalawag—I mean that colonel—away. Odalite, I hope you won't take it amiss, but I don't mind telling you that I always felt crowded, not only while he was in the house, but even when he was in the country. And, oh, I know I should feel as if I had ever so much more room if he was off the face of this earth—in some other planet of some other solar system."

Odalite looked all around the drawing room, and, seeing that she was alone with her next sister, whispered:

"And I don't mind telling you, Wynnette, if you will keep it a profound secret, that I entirely share your feelings."

"Oh—oh—oh! So them's your sentiments—I mean these are your feelings? Well, I thought so. But to hear you say it!" exclaimed Wynnette.

"Do not speak of it to any one, dear," said Odalite.

"Why not? I should be proud to proclaim it on the housetop."

"Because, dear, no one could understand. They would think me a lunatic."

"Oh! And you don't mind telling me because I understand and will think you sensible? Not to any extravagant extent I don't, though. I have not considered you just level—I mean *compos mentis*—since you consented to marry that puncheon—I mean officer. Hush! Here comes Jake!"

The negro entered, with an armful of holly, and the work went on in silence.

By noon all the decorations were completed, the litter of leaves gathered up, and the carpet covered with a tightly drawn linen cloth for the feet of the dancers.

The family took an early dinner, and dressed to re-

ceive their juvenile company, who were expected to begin to arrive in the afternoon.

Mrs. Anglesea, whose trunk came that morning from Forest Rest, arrayed herself gorgeously in a crimson brocaded satin, trimmed with black lace, necklace and bracelets of heavy California gold, and a brooch and earrings of burning carbuncles.

"None o' your pale, sick pearls, or icy, chilly diamonds for me! I like gems with fire and color in 'em. I do!" she exclaimed, as she drew on a pair of yellow kid gloves over her plump hands, and sailed out of her room, to the great admiration of Luce, who was looking on.

The ladies of the family made some difference in their usual home dress.

Mrs. Force wore a navy-blue silk, with some fine lace on her neck and wrists, and no jewelry.

Odalite wore a white cashmere, trimmed with white satin, a pearl necklace and earrings.

Wynnette and Elva wore their bridesmaids' dresses, with a difference—Wynnette with a coral necklace and earrings, and Elva with a turquoise set.

Miss Meeke wore a brown silk dress, with cameo ornaments.

They were all assembled in the parlor by five o'clock, waiting for their guests, who came a few minutes later.

First came the "break," driven by Le, and loaded with little people presided over by one big one.

They scrambled and tumbled out in a hurry, and ran pellmell into the open door of the hall, where the girls were received with rapture by Wynnette and Elva, who took them upstairs to a well-warmed spare room, where they could lay off their wraps.

The boys were conducted by Le to his own room, to take off their mufflers and to brush their hair.

The simple toilets of the young people took but a short time to arrange, and in fifteen minutes from the time

of their arrival they all filed into the drawing room and paid their respects to their host and hostess.

It was now half-past five, and growing dark outdoors.

There was no gas at Mondreer, but there were fine, large chandeliers in every room, and these were all fitted with wax candles, just lighted.

Three very large chandeliers, with quite a grove of wax candles, hung from the ceiling, and filled the drawing room with a mellow light that showed off to the best advantage the youthful beauty assembled there.

Besides the three lovely Force girls, there were the Grandieres—Sophy, Nancy, Polly and Peggy—four blooming lasses of ages ranging from ten to fourteen, and bearing to each other so strong a family likeness that they may collectively be described as plump, fair, rosy, blue-eyed and brown-haired. They all wore bright, blue merino dresses, trimmed with swan's-down, and white carnelian necklaces.

With them were their brothers, Ned and Sam, two fine, well-groomed lads, respectively fifteen and sixteen years of age, rosy, blue-eyed and brown-haired, like their sisters.

These two handsome lads, after making their bows to Mr. and Mrs. Force, went to find Wynnette and Elva, to engage them for the first dance, to be in good time, although the negro fiddlers had not yet taken their places.

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## CHAPTER XXXVIII

### AN OLD-TIME CHRISTMAS DANCE

"WHERE is Rosemary Hedge?" inquired Odalite, as soon as she could get a chance to speak to Le.

"She is coming. Oh, she would not miss it! Roland

Bayard is to bring her on, with her Aunt Susannah and Miss Sibby.

"With those grown people! Why, how is that? Not but what we shall be very glad to see them, you know."

"Of course. I know that, or I shouldn't have asked them."

"Oh, Le, you know you can always ask whoever you please to this house. You know it, Le!"

"Oh, yes, of course I do. I only meant to say that I would not have asked those two ladies if I had not known that they would be welcome. But I am going to tell how it was that I did ask them."

"Yes! Very well."

"You see, I went to Grandieres' first, and gave the pressing invitation, and, I tell you, the young ones jumped at it. They did not keep me waiting long while they got ready, and girls and boys soon tumbled up into the break."

"Yes, I will warrant that they did," said Odalite.

"Then I drove on to Grove Hill, where I found Miss Sibby spending the day. Roland had just brought her there in their mule wagon. I gave my message. There was a great meeting and great excitement between the Grandieres and the Elks. Rosemary and her little cousins, Erny and Melly, were wild to come. But the stately Miss Susannah declared that they could not go without a chaperon. So I invited her; then I could not 'make a bridge over Miss Sibby's nose,' so I invited her, also."

"I am very glad you did!" said Odalite.

"But all was not settled yet! Miss Grandiere declared that she and her nieces were not ready, and could not get ready for an hour to come; and, besides that, the addition of five more passengers to the seven we had already in the break would crowd us too much and be too heavy a load, even for our strong draft horses to draw so long a way over such rough roads."

"And that last was an undeniable fact."

"Of course it was! So I offered to take my party on and return later for the others. But Miss Grandiere urged that that would be too late for them."

"She was right again."

"Certainly! But then Roland came to the rescue, and offered to drive the second party over here in the mule cart, and so it was settled that he should do so. While we were talking, Mrs. Elk came in, and, of course, I had to invite her."

"She never goes out in the evening," said Odalite.

"No, of course not. And so she explained, and we excused her. And there they all come now! I hear the cart! I must go and see to them."

"And I, too," said Odalite, "must go and take the ladies and children upstairs."

And the young pair left the room together to receive the visitors, who had, by this time, entered the hall.

"Ah, this is just as it should be," said Miss Grandiere to Miss Bayard, as they saw Leonidas and Odalite approaching together.

"Yes, and a heap better than it might have been. If you knew as much as I do, you would say so, too!"

"What do you mean?" inquired Miss Grandiere, in a low voice.

"Hush! Here they are!" whispered Miss Bayard, as the two young people came up, with outstretched hands and eager voices, to welcome the visitors.

"You are in very good time! the dancing has not yet commenced," said Odalite, after the first greetings were passed.

"It is not yet seven o'clock," added Le.

And Odalite took off the two ladies and the three children to the warm dressing room to lay off their wraps, while Le carried off Roland to his own den, to brush his hair.

"My dear Odalite, I am so glad to see you looking so

well," said Miss Grandiere, when they had reached the chamber.

"I haven't seen her looking so bright for weeks. And that is right, sez I," added Miss Sibby.

"Thank you. Everybody tells me that," said Odalite, smiling.

Miss Grandiere was dressed in a rich, black silk, with a white lace fichu and white lace cuffs, and her black hair was plaited and wound into a roll at the top of her head and fastened with a very high back comb. Her front hair was divided in the middle and wound into curls, two down each temple.

Miss Sibby wore a plain black silk and a book-muslin cap, with a full lace border and white satin bows and strings.

The two little Elk girls, aged ten and twelve, were slender, dark-eyed, dark-haired, red-cheeked lasses, dressed in the most brilliant of Scotch plaids, with neatly crimped muslin ruffles around their throats and wrists and amber necklaces and bracelets.

But Rosemary Hedge's dress was the quaintest costume that the law—of society—allowed. It was a sage-green velvet, made out of one of Miss Grandiere's own old-fashioned gowns, and decorated all around the bottom of the skirt, the belt, the sleeves and the neck with crimson cypress vines, blue forget-me-nots and yellow crocuses, worked by Miss Grandiere's own fingers.

Rosemary wore no trinkets, her only ornament being her blue-black hair curled in ringlets all around her pretty head.

When the visitors were ready to go down, Odalite conducted them to the drawing room, where now, at one end, the negro musicians were seated on chairs raised upon a long, broad bench, and were beginning to tune their instruments, preparatory to playing up an inspiring quadrille tune.

As soon as Mrs. Anglesea saw the newcomers, she

made a dash across the room at them, and accosted them with effusion.

"So glad to see you all! And there's my gay, young sailor lad! Mind you, Roland Bayard, I won't take you away from the young uns all the time, because it is their party, but you must manage to give me half a dozen dances during the evening," she said.

"With the greatest pleasure, Mrs. Anglesea," said the gallant tar, "though I didn't know that you danced."

"Thought I was too large and heavy, eh? Well, I may be large, but I ain't heavy! A balloon is large, but it is light! I am also large, but I am light—on my feet! You shall see!"

"Well, will you give me the pleasure of your hand in this set?" he inquired.

"You bet!" she replied, placing her plump, yellow-gloved hand in his.

He led her to the head of the quadrille that was just forming.

Miss Meeke and young Dr. Ingle, who had "just happened in and been prevailed upon to stay," stood up together *vis-à-vis* to the California lady and her partner.

They were the head and foot couples. Ned Grandiere and Wynnette were on the right, Sam Grandiere and Elva were on the left. This was the form of the first set in the front half of the drawing room.

Mr. Force led Miss Grandiere to the head of another set at the back of the long room. Leonidas took Miss Sibby—who adored dancing—to the foot. Odalite stood with Erna Elk on the right hand, and Mrs. Force with Melly Elk on the left hand.

And the two included the whole company, with the exception of Rosemary Hedge and the four Grandiere girls.

The music struck up the favorite, old-fashioned "Coquette," and the dance began.

And, oh Terpsichore, how the lady from Wild Cats'

did foot it away! And she danced well—only, perhaps, just a little too vigorously for good taste.

The "Coquette" was followed by the "Basket," and then by "Malbrook," and lastly by the "Fire Brigade," which finished the set.

When Mrs. Anglesea, out of breath with her great exertions, was being led to her seat by her handsome, young partner, she passed Miss Sibby, who was sitting in an armchair, actively fanning herself with a hand screen.

"Too bad! Too bad, indeed!" said the lady from the mines, with more good nature than discretion; "too bad that you should have to dance, at your age, to make up a set!"

"What's that you say?" demanded Miss Sibby, with much spirit. "Me dance to make up a set, when all them five young gals was waiting? Me? Why, 'oman, I dote on dancing! I think it's heavenly—perfectly heavenly! It ought to be a lawful part of worship, sez I!"

"Oh, if that's your sort, I have no more to say! I only thought you looked kind o' played out and done for, that's all!" said Mrs. Anglesea.

"It does sort o' try one's breath; but it is heavenly, for all that! Perfectly heavenly! And I mean to dance the next set, too, if I can only get a partner!"

In other parts of the room other talk was going on.

"Odalite," said Leonidas, "will you give me the next dance?"

"Certainly I will, Le! I would have given you the first one, only I wanted you to dance with Miss Sibby!"

"Well, I obeyed you, and danced with her."

"You did not find it hard, did you?"

"I found it—funny!"

"Oh!"

"Miss Wynnette," said young Edward Grandiere, "will you be so very good as to give me this next dance, also?"

"Not if I know it! I mean, thank you very much, but I hope you will do me the favor of asking one of the Misses Elk to dance with you. I intend to put on Le's cap and be a gentleman, and ask one of your sisters to dance with me."

"Why, Miss Wynnette, how strange!"

"There's no help for it; there are not gentlemen enough in the company, so I must be one! Why, just see, here are fourteen ladies and only seven gentlemen. And always about the same proportion in this neighborhood, whether it be a ball, or a dinner party, or a tea-drinking, or a little dance like this. It is always the same—about twice as many ladies as gentlemen! Oh, I don't know what is to become of us all, unless we go out as missionaries to the heathen!" sighed Wynnette.

"You must not go! I beg you will stay and take care of one poor heathen!" said the boy, trying his boyish best to be gallant.

"Maybe I will—stay and take care of poor, old Gov. Broadvally, who has gout in his great toe and infidelity on his brain, and neither wife nor child to make him a poultice, or read him a sermon," said Wynnette, as she sprang up and left the side of her partner.

"Rosemary, darling, will you dance this set with me? I wished so much to dance the first set with you, but——" Roland Bayard, who was the speaker, paused, and Rosemary finished the sentence for him:

"You were caught and carried away captive by a gay lady! And what could a gentleman do?" she asked, smiling.

"Will you dance this set with me, then, darling child?" he repeated.

"With real pleasure, Roland," she answered, giving him her hand.

And he led her out.

In the sets that were now forming, the Grandiere girls, as well as all the other children, danced, and all the

grown women sat down, except Miss Sibby, who conscripted Mr. Force to dance with her.

Wynnette, as a gentleman, led out the youngest Miss Grandiere. And, the two sets being complete, the music struck up, the dancing commenced,

"And all went merry as a marriage bell."

The dancing concluded with the rollicking merry-go-round, called, in these days, the "Virginia Reel," but in the olden times known as "Sir Roger de Coverly," in which all hands—men, women and children, young and old—joined heartily, and none more heartily than Miss Sibby.

"Enjoy yourself as long as you can, sez I!" she hastily whispered into the ear of Le, as he whirled her around in the giddy maelstrom of that mad dance.

At ten o'clock the fiddlers had rest to their elbows and the banjo players to their hands, when they were marched off to the kitchen, to partake of good Christmas cheer.

In the parlor the guests were seated in somewhat stiff and formal rows, on sofas and chairs ranged along the wall, while two menservants, Jake and Jerry, bearing large trays of refreshments, made the circuit of the room —Jerry going first, with a great plum cake and plain pound cake, each beautifully frosted and decorated, and neatly cut from the center to the edge, ready for helping, and a pile of small, china plates and damask napkins. Le Force, walking beside this waiter, served each guest with a plate, a napkin and a slice of each cake.

Behind Jerry came Jake, bearing another large tray laden with cut-glass goblets filled to the brim with snowy, frothy eggnog, or amber apple toddy, or golden lemon punch. And beside this waiter walked Mr. Force, serving each guest with the special nectar he or she preferred.

When these good things had been disposed of, although it was but half-past ten, carriages were ordered, and all the county neighbors took leave and went home, for these were simple days "before the war"—or "befo' de wo," as the negroes more truly, if less grammatically, put it. And the people wished to get home and go to bed, that they might rise on Christmas morning in time to attend church in the forenoon.

Within an hour after their departure the household at Mondreer had retired to rest.

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## CHAPTER XXXIX

### A DECISIVE INTERVIEW

Sunrise on Christmas morning found all the family of Mondreer assembled in the drawing room, which had been already restored to order by the servants, and where no vestige of the previous night's festivity remained, except the beautiful evergreen decorations.

"Who are for church this morning?" inquired Mr. Force, looking around upon his assembled household.

"I think we all are, except, perhaps, Odalite, who may naturally shrink from the ordeal of appearing there so soon," replied Mrs. Force, in a tone so very subdued that it was scarcely redeemed from being that breach of good breeding, a whisper in company.

But Odalite, who stood next to her mother, heard the words, and replied:

"I must not shrink from going to church, mamma. If people choose to stare at me, to see how I bear what they suppose to be a heavy disappointment and a deep mortification, they will do so from a kindly interest, I am sure, and they will be pleased to find that, though I may be 'perplexed,' I am 'not in despair.' Besides, mamma, the

longer I stay away from church, the more I shall be stared at when I go."

"You are right, my dear," said Mr. Force, who immediately went out to give orders that all the carriages in the stables—that is to say, the family coach, the break and the buggy—should be got ready and brought around to take the family to All Faith Church.

There were other duties to be done before they broke their fast. On this day, the servants, not only of the house, but of the plantation, were all called in to family prayers.

The devotions were led by Mr. Force, assisted by Le.

When they were concluded, Christmas presents were distributed by the children of the family to all the negroes present, and sent by them to all those who, from old age, infancy or illness, were unable to attend the gathering.

When all the plantation servants had retired, with gratitude and gladness, the family went in to breakfast, where they enjoyed a merry morning meal.

As soon as it was over, they retired to their chambers to get ready for church.

And there each one, in his or her sanctuary, found some token of the presence of Santa Claus to be first discovered and enjoyed in secret. All were more or less valuable and attractive, but among so many presents, in so large a family, but few may be noticed.

Mr. Force found a warm, crimson, cashmere dressing gown, the united gift of his children; an embroidered silk smoking cap, from his wife; a pair of beaded slippers, from Miss Meeke, and a Turkish chibouk and a can of Turkish tobacco, brought all the way from beyond seas and kept for this day, by Le.

Mrs. Force found a sealskin dolman—one of the first ever made in this country—with muff and turban to match, from her husband; a satin patchwork quilt, which had been the secret work of a year, from her children;

an embroidered hand screen, from Miss Meeke, and an elegant ivory fan, brought from Canton, by Le.

Odalite received a "handy" edition of Shakespeare, in twelve small volumes, bound in white vellum and silver and inclosed in a white morocco case, with silver clasps, from her father; a small Bible, prayer book and hymn book, bound in white velvet, with silver clasps and inclosed in a hand case of white morocco, for church service, from her mother; a very handsome and completely fitted workbox, brought all the way from Canton, from Le.

Le himself received a very princely gift from his uncle, namely, a fine, young horse of famous stock, with a handsome saddle and bridle, from his aunt. These gifts were not exactly found in his chamber, only the letter conferring them on his dressing table. A box of articles made by Odalite during the three years of his absence—namely, six dozen white lambs' wool socks, knit by her own fingers, and each pair warranted to outlast any dozen pairs of machine-made hose; six ample zephyr wool scarfs, to be used—if allowed—during the deck watches of the winter nights at sea; six dozen pairs of lambs' wool gloves, six dozen pocket handkerchiefs, with his name worked in the corners with the dark hair of her head. All these, for their intrinsic usefulness, would have been very valuable; but for the love and thought worked into them by the dear fingers of her whom he loved, and during the longs years of his absence, this box of treasures was invaluable to Le. The wealth of the Rothschilds could not have bought it from him. Each precious item, as he turned it about in his hands, and kissed it again and again, was full of her magnetism.

He put on a pair of the socks, because he loved to feel them next him. He put one of the handkerchiefs in his bosom, next his heart, for the same reason. But it would

take up too much time and space to tell of all the Christmas offerings of that happy day.

The children had passed the age of dolls and dolls' furniture, but they received beautiful dressing cases, with boxes and writing desks, all fitted up and exactly alike, except that brunette Wynnette's were all lined with crimson velvet or satin, and blond Elva's with blue; and they received books and trinkets suitable to their years.

Miss Meeke received a pair of gold bracelets from her pupils and a black silk dress from their parents.

Even the transient guest, Mrs. Anglesea, received from Mr. and Mrs. Force a handsome set of coral and gold jewelry that exactly suited her style and taste.

So no one was overlooked; and, when the family reassembled in the drawing room before starting for church, there ensued a gay confusion, a mirthful strife, in the mutual offering and deprecating acknowledgments. But at last they entered the carriages and drove away to All Faith.

Mr. and Mrs. Force, Odalite and Mrs. Anglesea rode in the family coach, driven by Jake; Miss Meeke and her two pupils in the buggy, driven by Wynnette, who was already a famous "whip."

The household servants rode in the break.

Le, mounted on the young horse given him by his uncle, escorted the whole party, and made himself very useful in opening gates or taking down bars for the caravan.

They all reached the church in good time. The party entered their pews without feeling any annoyance. If they were stared at, they did not know it.

The Christmas service was always a grand jubilee, deeply interesting, highly exalting, and Dr. Peters' sermon was sure to be good, cheerful and appropriate.

After the benediction, when the congregation began

to disperse, the usual neighborly greetings took place in the yard.

Friends came up to wish merry Christmas and happy New Year to the Forces, and to receive the like courtesies from them. Happily, every one had the good taste to ignore the unseemly events of the previous Tuesday.

And the Force family left the churchyard more at ease than they had entered it.

The journey home was, therefore, very pleasant.

The subsequent Christmas dinner was a festival, and the dessert was prolonged with cracking nuts, making "philopena" bargains, opening sugar kisses and exchanging "verses."

It was not until after dinner that Le got a chance to speak to Odalite.

"Will you come out for a walk with me? It is not cold," he whispered, as they all left the dining room.

"Yes," she answered; "and we will go now, or it will be too late."

And she took down her brown beaver coat and poke bonnet that always hung in the hall ready for common use, and began to put them on.

Le took his overcoat and cap from the same rack, and speedily incased himself. Their gloves were in the pockets of their coats, and so they were soon ready, and in two minutes opened the hall door and left the house.

It was a fine winter twilight. The sun had just set, and the western hemisphere was all aflame with the afterglow. The moon had just risen from behind the deep blue waters of the bay, and was shining broad and full from a rosy gray sky. Though the woods were bare, and the earth was brown with winter, the scene was pleasant in its soft, subdued color and veiled brightness.

## CHAPTER XL

### AGAIN BY THE WINTRY SEA

"We will walk down by the shore; it is always pleasant there," said Le.

"Yes, let us go there. It will be too dark in the woods, but there will be moonlight on the sea and shore."

And they walked through the east gate, and down the wooded hill to the water side.

From an instinct of delicacy, Le turned to the south, which led in an opposite direction from his own home; but Odalite stopped him.

"Let us walk north, toward Greenbushes. We cannot go so far, because it is too late, but it will be pleasant to walk in that direction, Le," she said.

"Will it, now? To you, Odalite?" he asked, surprised and pleased, yet anxious.

"Very, very pleasant," she answered, brightly.

He turned with her at once, and had courage to ask:

"Will you take my arm, Odalite?"

She took it at once, and, when he held her hand close to his throbbing heart, she did not draw it away. What should he say to her? How should he understand her? She seemed content, and even happy, to be alone with him. She seemed exactly as she had been before the tempter came between them—content and happy—though it had only been four days since she had been suddenly and effectually separated from the man whom she had declared that she wished to marry. She had said that no one forced her to marry him. Bnt—did any one force her to wish to marry him? That was the question. Was his dream or vision at sea a prophetic one? Was Wynnette's and Elva's belief a true inspiration? And had Odalite, in her consent to marry Anglesea, thrown herself into the waves to escape the flames? And now

that she was happily rescued from the waves, was she glad?

He looked at her again. Her face was calm and bright. And it was a true index to her mind, which was also calm and bright.

Why should it not be? She had been saved from a fate worse than death—saved from the slavery of an abhorrent marriage; she was free—with a sense of freedom that she had never fully enjoyed until she had lost her liberty and regained it. Her own and her dear mother's mortal enemy, whose presence, even on the continent, crowded her as it did Wynnette, was gone across the sea! And she knew nothing—poor child!—of the chain the man had thrown around her mother's, his victim's, neck before he went away! Mrs. Force had never told that dread secret to her daughter. It was not necessary to do so, at least not yet, so she let Odalite recover her cheerfulness and enjoy her life, if it were only in a fool's paradise.

So Odalite reveled in a fanciful freedom, which to her was delightfully real.

Le looked at her, watched her, studied her.

Her eyes were bright with pleasure, her cheeks flushed with health, her lips smiling in mirth, her step was so light that she seemed to dance along the sands, and her voice was so fresh and cheerful that it was impossible to believe that she cherished any other feeling on the subject of her broken marriage than one of delight at her enfranchisement.

"Odalite," he said, at length, "you seem very happy."

"I am very happy," she replied, beaming.

"Then you have not the least regret for that——"

"There! Stop just there, Le, dear! Never mention that nightmare dream to me while you live!" said Odalite, in a commanding but jubilant tone.

"Well, then, I won't. Goodness knows I am not so

fond of him as to want to ring the changes on his name!"

"It was nothing but a nightmare dream, Le, and I wish to forget all about it."

"Then you never loved him——"

"Loved him!" interrupted Odalite, with flushing cheeks and flashing eyes. "Who ever imagined that I could ever love him? I never told you that I loved him, Le."

"No, by Jove, so you never did! You never told me that you loved him; and you did tell me that you had never let him kiss you!" exclaimed Le, with a new ring of joy in his voice and a new light of joy in his eyes.

"No," said Odalite. "It was my greatest merit and my worst fault that I did not love him when I consented to marry him. I was wrong, under any inducement, to consent to such a union; but, Le, if I had loved him, I must have been something of a kindred spirit to him! And that, you know, I am not."

"Odalite!" said the young man, taking her hand between both of his and trying to calm his tumultuous feelings, and to speak quietly, while they slackened their pace and walked very slowly; "Odalite, darling, I had a long interview with your father yesterday, in which we talked over all these matters. He believes that your fancy and imagination were fascinated, captivated by the arts of that man, who shall be nameless, because I cannot bear to utter, nor you to hear, the accursed name. Your father, however, gave me permission to have this final talk with you, on certain conditions, which I promised to keep."

Odalite looked up, anxiously, into his face.

"My darling," he said, as he caressed the hand he held, "when I asked you to take this walk with me to-night, it was because I knew that you were free in hand, at least, to receive the proposal that I came to make you; it was not that we should immediately renew the old en-

gagement that bound our hearts and souls together from our childhood up to the time when the stranger came between us, for I did not know then that your heart, as well as your hand, was free. I thought that it would take time to heal the wound that I supposed you had received in the sudden rupture of your marriage; but that, in time, your woman's pride, your sense of honor and your conscientiousness would enable you to conquer any lingering interest you might feel in that man. So I came here not to plead for an immediate renewal of our precious betrothal, but only to plead as the best grace you might give me that we might correspond, as brother and sister, while I am at sea, doing my duty there and waiting for the time when we may, please Heaven, be united in a dearer, closer love——"

"But, Le!" she broke out, impulsively; "I love you—I love you—I have never ceased to love you, Le!" And then she would have given words to have recalled the hasty, if true, words.

But they were spoken, and every tone of her voice, every glance of her eyes, every play of her features gave such unquestionable evidence of their truth that she never could have repudiated them.

"Then, oh, my dearest one! why were you ever beguiled into consenting to marry that man—into thinking that you could possibly live with that man?"

"Oh, Le, I was never for a moment beguiled! I never for one moment imagined that I could live with him. I knew I could not do so. I knew I should die under the upas tree of his hateful presence! I knew that it was my life I laid down to save others whom I did love!"

"Odalite!" he exclaimed, amazed and overwhelmed by her passion.

"Le! Oh, Le! I have told you more than I meant ever to have told any one! The truth burst from my heart unawares. Forget what I have said, Le! Oh, forget it!"

"Never, never, never can I forget these words, dear Odalite! Those words that have revealed to me a glimpse of a soul braver, nobler, more self-immolating than I ever believed could live in the form of mortal man, not to say in that of a fragile girl," said the young man, fervently, earnestly.

"Oh, dear Le, such overpraise humbles me! Let it pass! But, oh, my dear, as you unwittingly surprised my confidence, so respect it. Whisper it to no human being —no, not even to yourself in your moments of deepest solitude!" she pleaded.

"I will not, my best beloved, my only love! I will not; but I will hide it in my heart as my secret, sacred treasure, to comfort me, to strengthen me, to elevate me in all places and circumstances of my life—in the long, long sea voyages, in the midnight watches on the deck, it shall be my hope, my solace and my consolation. Always with me, until I return to claim the greater, higher, better treasure that it promises!" exclaimed Le, with enthusiasm.

"Oh, Le, you have twice spoken of the sea! But you will never go to sea again! You have resigned from the navy," she said, anxiously looking in his face for a confirmation of her words.

"No, dear," he answered, very gently. "I have not resigned. I wish now that I had done so, but it is too late."

"Oh, Le, why did you not, when you meant to do so?"

"My darling, when I inherited Greenbushes, I fully intended to leave the navy, marry my betrothed, and settle down on our farm. But, when I came home and learned that she was to be married to some one else, I did the very opposite thing to resigning. I wrote to the department and asked for sailing orders, because I could not bear to stay in the neighborhood, or even in the country, after such a bitter disappointment."

"Oh, my dear Le!"

"Never mind, love. It will all come right now. I put Greenbushes in the hands of Beever and Copp, and waited to hear from the department. I received my sailing orders yesterday. That was the reason why I spoke to your father and asked for this interview."

"Oh, Le! Le! can you not yet resign?" pleaded Odalite.

"Yes, dear, of course I can, but not with honor. Having asked for these orders, I must obey them. I must not trifle with duty, dear Odalite," he answered, gravely.

"Oh, Le, and there seems no real necessity for you to go!"

"Honor, love," gently suggested the youth.

"When do you leave us, and where are you going this time, Le?"

"I leave on the second of January, to join my ship at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, to sail in a few days after for the Pacific coast."

"Oh, I am so sorry! But I ought not to say so, Le. I ought not to say anything to make it harder to do your duty, and I will not."

"Dearest Odalite, will you say something that will make it easy for me to do my duty? Will you say that you will correspond with me regularly while I am gone, as you did during my first voyage? And will you promise that when I return, three years hence, and leave the service—as I can with honor then—you will give me this dear hand of yours, which I cannot help feeling belongs to me only, and has belonged to me of right all the time? Say you will give me your hand, Odalite! Shall I go away happy in the knowledge that you are to be my wife on my return?"

"Oh, yes! Yes, Le! With all my heart!" she impulsively answered. Then, catching her breath in a spasmodic way, as some painful thought sped like an arrow through her heart, she added, in a subdued tone: "But,

Le, before anything of that sort is quite settled between us, I want you to talk with my mother about it."

"But why? Aunt Elfrida will have no objection. She likes me. She liked our engagement, before any one came between us," said Le, growing uneasy and very thoughtful.

"Yes, I know she loves you, Le, and liked our engagement. And, of course, all will be right! But, still, I would rather that you should speak to my mother," persisted the girl, with a dark foreshadowing of evil which she could not shake off.

"Well, love, I will have a talk with Aunt Elfrida to-night," said Le, with a laugh.

"No, no, not to-night. We shall be in the drawing room, engaged in some Christmas games for the children. Do not take her away from the family circle to-night. To-morrow will do quite as well. You can talk to her after breakfast," pleaded Odalite, with a shudder she could not control.

"You are cold," said Le. "I have kept you out too long. Come, let us go home. I will speak to Aunt Elfrida in the morning."

They turned and walked homeward under the moonlight, wintry sky, along the shore, then up the wooded hill, through the lawn and on to the house, the whole front of which was brilliantly lighted from within in honor of the holy, festive season.

They entered, and threw off their wraps in the hall, just as the tea bell rang.

A merry party assembled around the table, upon which every suitable Christmas dainty was spread.

After tea the family and guests, with the new addition of Dr. Ingle—who dropped in, as usual—gathered in the drawing room, and engaged in merry games, in which they spent the Christmas evening.

## CHAPTER XLI

### HIS FATE

"Aunt Elfrida, dear, I want to speak to you. Can you give me a few moments, quite alone, this morning?" inquired Le of Mrs. Force, in a low voice, as they left the breakfast room together, the last two in the rear of the party.

"Yes, Le. Come into my siting room, where we shall be uninterrupted," replied the lady, in the same subdued tone, and with a somewhat troubled look, as if she anticipated a painful interview.

The other members of the family passed on through the door on the right side of the hall and entered the drawing room.

Mrs. Force turned from them and opened the door on the left and preceded Le into the little parlor.

When they were both in the room, the lady shut the door and turned the key, and motioned Le to take one armchair on one side of the center table, while she herself sank into the other, saying:

"Now then, Le, dear boy, I am ready to hear what you wish to say to me."

"Maybe you know, Aunt Elfrida, that I am going to sea in a few days," he said, leaning over the table toward her.

"Yes, Le, I heard so from your uncle, and was very sorry to hear it, dear boy."

"I suppose my uncle told you why—just as I had come into a rich inheritance—I applied for sailing orders?"

"Yes, Le."

"And why, though now I would like to resign, I cannot, in honor, do so?"

"He told me all, Le."

"I shall be gone for three years, Aunt Elfrida."

"I know it, and I am very sorry."

"I—I shall leave you all on the second of January—and—and before I go I would like to have an understanding with you about—about Odalite," said Le, stammering and blushing as if he had been asking for the hand of his sweetheart for the first time; but, then, it was so soon after her broken marriage, and his act seemed so audacious.

The lady turned pale and gripped the edge of the table for suport. It had come, then, the ordeal she had dreaded so much.

"Odalite!" she faltered.

"Yes, Aunt Elfrida; and I should ask your pardon for speaking of my hopes just now! And I should not presume to do so, only that I am going away so soon, and am to be gone so long," faltered the lover, blushing more intensely than before.

"What have you to say of Odalite, then?" inquired the lady.

"Oh, Aunt Elfrida! Can you ask? I wish, first of all, your permission to correspond with her while I am away, just as I did before, you know! And then, most of all, I wish that it shall be understood—just as it was before—that when I return from my next voyage Odalite and I may be married. And—and, of course, I shall leave the navy then and settle down with Odalite at Greenbushes—just as it was understood and arranged that we should do before—before the stranger came to trouble us. That is what I want and hope and pray for, Aunt Elfrida!" pleaded the lover.

The lady's head was dropped upon her hand while her elbow rested on the table. She was silent and thoughtful for a few moments, that seemed hours to Le's anxiety, and then she asked:

"Do you think it right, dear boy, to approach a young

girl on the subject of a second engagement so soon after the disruption of her marriage at the altar?"

The question was not unkindly put, yet the blush deepened on the youth's cheek.

"I said that I would not mention the subject now but that I am going away in so few days, and for years! Nor would I, even under these circumstances, if it were not that"—he suddenly caught himself up and stopped. He had been on the brink of involuntarily betraying Odalite's confidence and adding: "Odalite herself admits that she has no regret for her broken-off marriage, and never really cared for any one but her first lover;" for Le was all unaccustomed to having secrets to keep.

"What were you going to add, dear boy? 'If it were not that'—what?" inquired the lady, who had observed his hesitation and embarrassment.

"If it were not that I know her to be quite free," he answered, diplomatically.

"But is she quite free, Leonidas?" gravely questioned the lady.

"Is she not?" demanded the youth, in astonishment.

"I do not know, my boy! I am not sure! But oh, Le! I have never breathed a doubt on this subject to her! And do not you breathe this to any living soul!" solemnly replied the lady.

"Great Sphinx of Egypt!" said the youth to himself. "Have I got to keep the secrets of each one from all the others? And without even having the satisfaction of knowing what the secrets are?"

"Listen to me, Le," said the lady, kindly. "I have no objection to your corresponding with Odalite while you are on your voyage; but there must be no engagement, or hint of an engagement between you, either before you go or in any of your letters. Moreover, your letters must not be directed immediately to Odalite, but under cover to me."

"I thank you for even so much grace, Aunt Elfrida; but why may not my letters be directed to Odalite?"

"Because they might get her unjustly and disrespectfully talked about," said she, evasively.

"But, oh, Aunt Elfrida! why should you doubt that Odalite is free? Why, the fact is abundantly proven."

"No, dear boy, there is where the trouble is. We think it was proven, but we are not sure. What we are sure of is this—that there was a marriage ceremony performed by special license, and by a regularly ordained minister of the gospel, and in the presence of more than a hundred witnesses, between Angus Anglesea and Odalite Force, and which, if both parties were free to contract marriage at the time, binds them together as man and wife for the term of their natural lives. That is all that we positively know, Le," gravely replied the lady.

The youth sprang up from his chair with a cry of pain.

"I cannot bear to think of that!" he said, as he dropped again into his seat. "But it cannot be true! The news from St. Sebastian proves that the man was the husband of another woman at the time that he tried to marry your daughter—and that therefore the ceremony was no marriage at all, and she is free."

"Leonidas, let me put a possible case. Suppose that when Anglesea married the Californian widow he had an invalid wife living at the time in England. Then the marriage with the Californian would have been of no effect. Suppose, in the interim between the ceremony performed in the church at St. Sebastian and this performed at All Faith Church, the invalid wife had died—then the last marriage would be legal and binding."

"Oh, Aunt Elfrida Why do you suppose such dreadful conditions?" exclaimed the youth.

"Because, my poor boy, I have reason to believe them to be the true conditions," sorrowfully replied the lady.

The youth sprang up and walked the floor in great excitement.

"What reasons have you for thinking as you do?" he at length demanded.

"I cannot tell you now, dear boy."

"But you do not know this to be the case? You only think so?" he questioned.

"No, I do not know it; because I cannot rely upon the truthfulness of my informant, nor on the genuineness of the evidence offered."

"Who was your informant, Aunt Elfrida?"

"I cannot tell you, Le."

"But, anyhow, I am sure if that villain had any claim at all on Odalite, brute that he was, he would have pushed it to extremity!"

"No doubt he would if he had dared, but he dared not, Le! If he had claimed Odalite as his lawful wife, on the ground that his former marriage with Mrs. Wright was an illegal one, upon account of the fact of his having had a wife living at the time it was contracted, and dead since, be sure that the honest California woman, finding herself deceived, would have prosecuted him for bigamy, and our courts would have punished him with the utmost rigor of the law! So, though he might have a lawful claim on Odalite, he dared not press it! No, nor dared he even to remain in the country. You know that he has sailed for England."

"Yes, thank Heaven! But, oh, Aunt Elfrida, if there should be any foundation for your fears that Anglesea has any claim on Odalite, then Uncle Abel should see to it at once and have her freed from such a monster by course of law," vehemently exclaimed Le.

"And so he should, if there were any certainty about that claim; but there is none. Odalite may be free or she may not be. We cannot be sure until we know more of the man's antecedents. Le, you must be patient, and very prudent. Odalite's position is a very delicate one. You must not think of entering into any engagement with her at present, or doing anything, or saying any-

thing, or writing anything that shall compromise her in the very slightest degree. I am very sure that you would not, Le."

"I would die first," earnestly answered the youth.

"You can write to her as often as you please as a brother might write to a sister, and through me, always. Remember that, and wait for events, Le. Be sure of one thing—under no circumstances will Abel Force ever give his daughter to Angus Anglesea. If he—Anglesea—should ever be able to prove that the ceremony performed in All Faith Church last Tuesday was a lawful one, Odalite's father would at once institute legal proceedings to liberate his daughter from that merely nominal and most disreputable marriage. Be sure of that, Le, and be patient. You cannot return before three years, and in three years much may happen—indeed, much must happen!"

"I will try to be patient, Aunt Elfrida. But, oh, what a fate is mine!"

"It is a hard fate, Le; but Odalite shares it. If you must live in suspense, why, so must she. Bear your fate for her sake, Le."

"I will! I will, Aunt Elfrida!" earnestly answered the youth.

"And remember, Le, you are not to breathe to Odalite my doubts as to her freedom from Anglesea's yoke."

"I will not, Aunt Elfrida. I would not make her so unhappy," replied the lover. "I will only tell her," he added, "that you think we had better correspond in the way you suggested, and wait for my return from sea to settle matters; or shall I refer her to you?"

"Do both, Le. Tell her what you propose to tell, and send her to me."

"I will not keep you any longer from your guests, Aunt Elfrida. I thank you very much for your kindness to me, and I shall be guided by your words," said

the young man, as he raised the hand of the lady to his lips, and then dropped it with a bow and left the room.

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## CHAPTER XLII

### OTHER INTERVIEWS

He found Odalite waiting for him in the hall. She was dressed for a walk.

"Let us go over to Greenbushes this morning, Le. It is such a fine morning. We can walk through the woods, and rest on the bridge at Chincapin Creek, and then we shall not be too tired when we get to the house," she said in so many words, but all the while she spoke her eyes asked, without words:

"What did mamma say?"

"Happy thought! We will go, dearest. I will be ready in a trice! And we can talk as we go along!" replied Le, with assumed gayety, as he pulled down his overcoat from its hook and began to put it on.

In two minutes they passed out of the front door, crossed the lawn, and entered the wood by the north gate.

"Now, then, what did mamma say?" eagerly demanded Odalite, as they went along the wooded path leading to the creek.

"She says, my darling, that I may write to you all the time I am away, as I would write to my sister, if I had one; but that I must not draw you into any engagement to marry—or words to that effect," replied Le, putting the hard case as gently as he could.

"I thought she would do that," said Odalite, in a sorrowful and subdued tone.

"But, dearest dear! that does not prevent my binding myself to you in the most solemn manner for life and

until death, and after death and to all eternity, if one may be permitted to do so. And here I swear, under this blue sky and bright moon and in the presence of high heaven, that I will be true to you, Odalite, dearest Odalite, all the days of my life in this world and in the next, forever and ever! But yet I must not bind you by any promise, darling?"

"You do not need to, Le," she answered, sweetly and solemnly. "You do not need to bind me by a promise. You know my heart, Le. And you know that you can trust me! No word that might not pass between a brother and a sister will pass between us, for we shall know each other's hearts, and that shall suffice and satisfy us until we meet again, shall it not?"

"Yes, Odalite! Yes, dearest dear! Until we meet again! And when we meet again, after my long voyage, by all that is holy and sacred in love and in life neither man nor devil shall part us!" warmly exclaimed Leonidas.

"Oh, you mean things!" exclaimed a merry voice behind them.

Leonidas and Odalite turned at once to see two little figures in buttoned coats and poke bonnets running toward them, followed by the dog.

"Oh, you mean things, you!" continued Wynnette, "to sneak for a walk to Greenbushes, without telling me and Elva a word about it!"

"But Joshua told us—he did, indeed! You forgot to untie him when you started, Odalite, and he set up such a howl of anguish and despair that I had to run out to see what was the matter with him," said Elva.

"And I had to follow, and I found him telling Elf such a tragic tale of how you and Le had gone off and left him tied up, without even looking behind to bid him good-by, that his heart was quite broken, and he had been trying to hang himself on his own chain ever since!" added Wynnette.

"So, you see, I unchained him. But, do you know, he wouldn't go without us? He kept running on a little way and then running back and begging and praying of us to come so hard that at last Wynnette and I went in and put our bonnets and coats and came after you," said Elva.

"Joshua knew you were going to Greenbushes, and he wanted to go with you. So did we when he told us where you were gone. You don't deserve such devotion; but you have got it anyway," concluded Wynnette.

It seemed rather hard that the children should interrupt the *tête-à-tête* of lovers who had come out of the house to saunter through the woods on purpose to be alone, and who were so soon to be separated for so long a time; but Leonidas and Odalite took the matter in perfectly good humor, and the four walked on amiably together.

They reached Greenbushes in good time, and had a treat of sweet cider, gingerbread and Indian walnuts from Aunt Molly.

And after a good rest they set out to return to Mondreer, where they arrived in time for dinner.

In the meanwhile Mrs. Force was subjected to another interview. Leonidas and Odalite had scarcely left the house, and Mrs. Force had scarcely settled down to her embroidery, when there came a gentle tap at the door.

"Come in," said Mrs. Force.

Miss Meeke entered, her pretty, pale face slightly flushed, her usually quiet demeanor somewhat disturbed.

"Can I speak to you alone for a few moments, ma'am?" she inquired, rather nervously.

"Certainly, my dear. Take that easy chair," said the lady, in some surprise, as she motioned her visitor to be seated.

Miss Meeke sat down, but continued perfectly silent and extremely ill at ease.

Mrs. Force observed her for some minutes, and seeing no prospect of her speaking, inquired gently:

"What can I do for you, my dear?"

"I—I——" began the governess, taking up the corner of her black, silk apron and beginning to scrutinize it very attentively, while her nervousness increased every instant—"I—do not know—that you can do anything for me, ma'am; but—but—but——"

"Well, my dear?" inquired the lady, kindly, seeing that the governess had paused in her embarrassment.

"I think I ought—that it is my duty to give—to say—to tell——" began the poor girl, falteringly, and then coming to another dead halt.

"Can I help you out in any way? Are you in any difficulty? Have you any complaint to make? Speak, my dear. Do not be afraid," said the lady.

"Oh, no—but—I am going to be married!" suddenly blurted out the girl, as by a heroic effort, and then she flushed crimson over cheeks, neck and brow.

"Oh!" exclaimed Mrs. Force, not very much surprised, after all, for she had long seen to what purpose the visits of the little, red-haired and freckle-faced Dr. Ingle tended.

Then, recovering herself, she arose and kissed the young governess tenderly, saying:

"I congratulate you with all my heart, dear. Dr. Ingle is a very worthy young man. Your intended is Dr. Ingle, I suppose?' said the lady, suddenly remembering that the governess had mentioned no name.

"Yes," said Miss Meeke, recovering herself, now that the ice had been broken.

"Then I am very glad, for your sake. And very sorry for the children's," she added.

Then Miss Meeke began to cry.

"I cannot bear to leave Wynnette and Elva," she sobbed.

"You will not be parted from them, dear," kindly sug-

gested Mrs. Force. "You will be our neighbor, you know. You will come to see us very frequently, I hope. And as for the children, they will run after you so much that I expect you will wish them a thousand miles off."

"Oh, no! Never! never! Dear, bright Wynnette and fond Elva!"

"When your time comes you will be married from this house, my dear, as if you were a daughter of the family. And if you have any friends or relatives whom you would like to have present, give me their names and addresses, and I will invite them to come and stay for the wedding," said the lady.

"Oh, madam! how can I thank you? But your kindness to-day is only a continuation of the kindness you have shown me during the whole seven years I have lived at Mondreer. And always you have treated me as a daughter of the house. And my pupils have been as younger sisters. Ah! It seems ungrateful in me to leave them before they are grown up and out of my care."

"Do not think of that, my dear. Marriage is the natural destiny of a young woman. You have given enough of your youth to my children, and now that 'a good man and true' like Dr. Ingle loves you and wins your love, and offers you marriage, you should marry."

"I have been very happy here with you and through you, madam," said the governess.

"If it is so, as I hope and believe it is, it will be a very pleasant memory for us all. Do your pupils know of your engagement?"

"Oh, no! And I do so much dread to tell them!"

"Well, do not let them look forward to the marriage as a parting. Talk to them of your new home, and the happy times they will have in visiting you," said Mrs. Force.

Miss Meeke smiled and blushed, and said:

"I was to go to-morrow to inspect a new house in the

village that the doctor was thinking of taking, if I should like it. Perhaps the children might go with me. Shall I ask them?"

"Certainly. They would be delighted. It will be a good opportunity also in which to break the news to them. And, without doubt, they will be very prompt in giving their valuable counsel on the subject. But tell me, my dear, when is this happy event to come off?"

"Early in January. That is to say, if, in the meantime, you can suit yourself with another governess, for I should not think of leaving you until you had supplied my place."

"I should not think of supplying your place with a new governess, my dear. Indeed, I have other plans. I have been thinking of going to Washington to spend the winter. If you were to remain with us, I should take you; but, as you are to be married, I shall, instead of engaging a private governess, place my children at some good finishing school—— Well Who is there?" suddenly demanded the lady, as a loud rap sounded on the room door.

"Why, it's me! Who should it be?" said the voice of Mrs. Anglesea, as that jovial lady burst into the room, exclaiming: "I was moped all but to death, all alone by my own self in the big parlor ever since breakfast. As well been at Wild Cats'!"

"Oh, come in, Mrs. Anglesea. I do, indeed, owe you an apology. I hope you will excuse me, but—I have been particularly engaged all the forenoon," said the mistress of Mondreer, as she arose and placed a chair for her guest.

"Thanky'! I hope I haven't interrupted you?" said the lady from the gold mines, dropping into the seat.

"Oh, no. We are quite at leisure now," replied Mrs. Force.

"I wouldn't have disturbed you by coming here, only I declare to man, I have been in every room in the house

looking for some one to talk to, without finding a soul. And I even went into the kitchen, to talk to the cook, but she was out, and there wasn't a soul there, though the pot was b'ilin' over, and the goose was burning in the roaster. So I sat down on a stool on the hearth, and basted the goose and turned it, and much thanks I got for my pains. For presently, when the cook come back with a passel of cold mince pies to be put in the oven and warmed—she had been to the storeroom to fetch 'em—she as much as told me my room was better'n my company, or words to them effects. Leastways, she did say as ladies what was visitors hadn't no business in her kitchen. So then I come right in here."

"Our cook only wished to show her respect for you, and to do you honor; but, being a very simple and ignorant negro woman, she did not know how to do so politely and properly," soothingly replied the lady of the house.

"What I would like is to be useful, and to do something to help earn my keep. But, with so many folks about the place. I don't see as there's any room for me, or anythink to do; so I reckon I had better vamoose the ranch," said the lady from Wild Cats', but without the least loss of temper.

"I beg you to believe that we are all very much pleased to have you remain with us just as long as you can make it convenient to do so," replied Mrs. Force, with sincere hospitality; for she had nothing but good feeling toward the honest woman who was her chance guest.

"Thanky'. I knowed that. But, you see, I don't want to dress up in my best clothes every day, and sit in the big parlor, with my hands crossed before me in idleness, all day long. It seems like a sinful wasting of time, in one like me, who for cooking, washing and ironing, or scrubbing, sweeping, and dusting, hasn't her betters in this univarsal world!" said the colonel's wife.

"You want something to employ your time——" began Mrs. Force.

"You bet!" interjected her guest.

"Well, then, suppose you let me teach you how to do this silk embroidery. It is beautiful and attractive fancywork, and very easy to learn," said Mrs. Force, holding out her frame, on which was stretched the half-finished cover of a foot cushion.

"What! that rubbish?" disdainfully inquired the Wild Cats' lady. "No, thanky'! You can buy a great deal prettier things than that in any of the fancy stores for less money than the things cost to make it with, let alone the lost time! No, ma'am! If I must waste all the days of my life, let it be in honest, barefaced idleness, like I'm a-doing of now, and not in pretending to work—playing at work, like you ladies here! I beg all your pardons! I never meant no offense, but I'm bound to tell the truth!"

"No offense is taken; but we think our handiwork is a little more real, fine, delicate and substantial than the machine work sold in shops," replied Mrs. Force, in some delicate, deprecating defense of her embroidery.

Before Mrs. Anglesea could reply, the door was opened by Mr. Force, who had just come in from his daily ride around his plantation.

He greeted all the ladies present, and the conversation became general.

A little later on, Leonidas and the girls came in from their walk, and the family party separated to get ready for dinner, and at the usual hour met again around the table.

## CHAPTER XLIII

### LE GOES TO JOIN HIS SHIP

THE next morning Dr. Ingle called to keep an appointment with Miss Meeke. He came in his gig to take her to the village to inspect a certain house that he thought of leasing. But she ordered him to send his gig to the stable, and let his horse rest, while he availed himself of the family carriage in which to take her and her invited company, her little pupils, to see the house on trial.

And these being the days of her power and his slavery, he obeyed without a murmur, and gave up his anticipated *tête-à-tête* drive with his betrothed, with as good a grace as he could assume.

Miss Meeke then gave her impromptu invitation to her little friends to accompany her in a drive; and, as they eagerly accepted the invitation, she sent Wynnette to order the carriage; all this was done according to a prearrangement with Mrs. Force.

"And we will not interrupt you and Leonidas all day long, for we are going to take lunch with us in the carriage, and we won't be home till night—maybe not till morning!

" 'Till daylight doth appear,' "

sang Wynnette, as she kissed her elder sister good-by, before running out to jump into the carriage.

Odalite and Leonidas, standing at the front window of the drawing room, watched their departure until the carriage passed through the west gate and rolled out of sight into the woods beyond.

Then they turned toward the fireplace, around, or near, which their father, mother and guest were seated.

And then it was that Mrs. Force announced to the

little group the approaching marriage of Dr. Ingle and Miss Meeke.

"Natalie going to leave us!" exclaimed Mr. Force, in mock despair.

" 'I never had a dear gazelle
To love me with its soft, dark eye,
But came a loafing ne'er-do-well
And stole her from me on the sly!' "

"Girls never know what's their own good," said Mrs. Anglesea, in all solemnity; "nor no more won't they learn nothing from experience! One girl marries and comes to grief; another sees that, and marries and comes to grief, also; a third does likewise; a fourth follows suit; and so on to the end of the chapter! Girls are just what I read som'er's or other about them and the pigs and the hot swill. You set a pail of it in the yard, and one pig will run and dip his nose into it, and run off scalded and squealing like mad; another sees that, but, all the same, dips his nose and runs off scalded and squealing like a house afire; and a third does likewise, and a fourth follows suit! And so on till the whole herd are scalded! And the girls are just like that!" concluded the lady from the land of gold.

"Oh, I hope not," said Mrs. Force.

"To leave a good home, where she has full run and plenty of everything, and not a care or a trouble on the face of the earth, and to go and marry a young, country doctor, with his way to make! And I know the way of country doctors, you bet! Oh, yes, they have a large practice and a wide one; but, as to the pay—oh, Lord! they ride scores and scores and scores of miles, day in and day out, and night after night, and never can be sure of a single night's rest or a single meal's vittals from year's end to year's end! But when it comes to pay—

Lord bless you! they gets more kicks than halfpence, so to speak!"

"We hope it will fare beter with our young couple," said Mr. Force, with a smile.

"Well, go on hoping, man! There's no law agin' it!" said the lady, leaning back in her softly cushioned chair and crossing her fat hands on her lap.

The driving party did not stay out until night, as Wynnette had threatened. The young doctor's professional duties, unprofitable as they might be to himself, would not admit of such a long holiday. They returned to Mondreer in good time for dinner, for which Dr. Ingle, at Mrs. Force's invitation, remained.

But immediately after they arose from the table he made his apologies, entered his gig, which had been brought around to the door, and drove away to make his professional calls.

As soon as he had left, Miss Meeke, overwhelmed with the consciousness of her position, stole away to her own room.

And then Wynnette and Elva, full of the importance of their communication, broke out with their wonderful "pipers' news" that Miss Meeke was going to be married to Dr. Ingle, and they were going to housekeeping in a beautiful, new cottage in the village, and that they—Wynnette and Elva—were to go whenever they pleased to spend weeks and weeks with the newly wedded pair, who would always keep a lovely bedroom for their use.

Every one present had the good nature to receive this story as the very newest news, and to be delightfully surprised and enchanted to hear it.

After dinner the evening passed, as usual during the holiday week, in merry parlor games.

On Sunday the whole family went to church, where, it is pleasant to record, the congregation stared less at the Forces and occupied themselves more with their de-

votions than they had been able to do on Christmas Day.

"You see," said Wynnette, confidentially, to Elva, on their way home, "that it was better for Odalite to take the bull by the horns at once—to face the music promptly—to break the ice bravely—to take the plunge and have it all over! Oh, you know what I mean well enough, Elf, although you pretend to look so puzzled! I mean, it was wise in Odalite to go to church on Christmas Day, just as usual—just as if nothing had happened there on the Tuesday before—and have it all over! And now it is all over. The great gun is fired, and no one is killed or wounded! That is to say that Odalite has made her first appearance in public after her catastrophe, and she has stood all the staring and has lived throught it! And now she has made her second appearance, and escaped all the staring! And the battle has been fought and victory won! Do you understand?"

"I understand a little, but, if you go on explaining, I shall not understand at all," replied Elva, with the cruel candor of childhood.

And the subject was immediately dropped.

On Monday morning, while the family party were gathered in the drawing room, opening their letters and papers, which the mail messenger had just brought from the post office, there came an early visitor.

Tom Grandiere, looking more red-headed, freckle-faced, blushing and blundering than usual, arrived, as the bearer of a verbal invitation to attend an informal party, to be composed mostly of young people, at Oldfield Lodge, on Thursday evening, the thirty-first, to dance the Old Year out and the New Year in.

"But, although," as he bashfully explained, "it was understood and intended to be a young folks' entertainment, yet the elders of the family were invited, and expected to be present with them."

This was quite in accordance with "the custom of the

country," or, at least, of the county, as had been shown at the Christmas Eve gathering at Mondreer.

"We thank you very much, and we shall like to go, if we can," said Mrs. Force, as she left her seat and went to the front window, where Odalite stood looking out on the fast-gathering clouds.

"You heard Tom Grandiere's message, dear?" she asked, in a low tone.

"Yes, mamma," answered Odalite, who slipped a letter into her pocket.

"Then it depends on you, dear, whether we accept the invitation or not. If you prefer to stay quietly at home, be sure that we shall not go and leave you alone."

"Then I prefer to go, mamma. I could not bear that the children should be disappointed. And, indeed," she added, seeing that her mother hesitated, "I shall enjoy going."

"Very well, dear," said Mrs. Force. And she went back and spoke to Tom Grandiere, accepting, in the name of her whole family, the invitation of which he was the bearer.

Tom then arose, and, saying that he had yet to go to a good many other houses, took leave and departed.

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## CHAPTER XLIV

### ANGLESEA AGAIN

Mrs. Force went up to her daughter, and said:

"Come with me to my own room. I have something to say to you."

Odalite immediately followed her mother to that little parlor which had been the scene of so many critical interviews.

When the door was shut, and the mother and daugh-

ter were seated together before the fire, the lady inquired:

"Odalite, my love, what letter was that which you received by this morning's mail, and put into your pocket the moment I joined you at the window?"

"Oh, mamma, it was a little note that would only have given you pain!" said Odalite, shrinking.

"Yet what was it? Tell me."

"It was a letter from him, mother, written on Saturday morning, an hour before he sailed for Liverpool. It was directed on the outside to Miss Odalite Force, but, on the inside, to Mrs. Angus Anglesea."

"The serpent! He knew full well that, if he had presumed to offer us such an affront as to give you his name where your father could see it, the insult would never have been permitted to reach your eyes! Where is the letter, Odalite? Let me see it."

The girl took the paper from its envelope, and, in wrath and scorn, read as follows:

"To Mrs. Angus Anglesea: My wife—for wife you are, despite all the false testimony brought forward to separate us—I was forced by circumstances to depart from you without a last farewell; yet I cannot deny myself the privilege of writing to you a last letter before I leave the country—to assure you that I am your lawful husband, lord and master, who will never yield one jot or tittle of his rights to mortal man or woman, but who will contest them, if need be, through every court in the country; and, if driven to extremity, will defend them at the sword's point. I refer you to your mother for proofs in her possession—proofs which I gave her, and which must convince you that our marriage was a perfectly regular and legal transaction, and that you are, therefore, my lawful wife, and I exhort you to be wise, prudent and faithful to your marriage bonds; for, be assured, I am not one who will brook offense, but who will

follow with swift, sharp vengeance the slightest infringement of my rights. I remain, and I intend to remain, until death, your husband, ANGUS ANGLESEA.

"NEW YORK, December —, 18—."

When Mrs. Force had read this delectable epistle, she tossed it into the fire, where it quickly blazed up and burned to ashes.

"There!" she said. "It is gone. Forget it, my dear. It was nothing but the vain boast of a brute, a coward and a braggadocio! He is on the ocean now, a fugitive from justice—yes, my dear, no less. He could not stay in this country without the danger of being prosecuted for bigamy, and sent to the State prison. He dared not stay and face that peril. In all human probability, we shall never see him again."

"But, mamma, has he—can he have—any claim on me? He referred me to you for proof that he has. What proof did he mean, mamma?" pleaded the girl.

"I do not believe that he has any claims on you, Odalite," gravely replied the lady.

"But, mamma, do you know that he has not?" inquired poor Odalite, in an access of anxiety.

"He has no claim that either the law or the gospel would sustain, or that your father would admit for a single instant."

"Oh, mamma, but has he any? Oh, mother, dear mother, speak plainly to me! He referred me to you for proofs that the marriage of last Tuesday was a lawful one. What proofs? What did he mean, mother?" pleaded Odalite, wringing her hands in growing doubt and distress.

"He meant to brag, to boast, to threaten to make you grieve, fear and suffer—the brute, the poltroon, the miscreant!" hissed the lady, stamping her foot.

"But, mother—oh, mother—the proofs, the proofs he spoke of!" persisted Odalite, white with dread.

"They are no proofs of anything; but I will tell you what he was writing of. Two days after the scene at the All Faith Church, while your father and your cousin were both out, that outlying brigand seized the opportunity for which he had been watching, and came in here to see and threaten me."

"Oh, mother, dear mother!" said Odalite, in tender compassion.

"Never mind, my child. He is away now, thank Heaven! His talk to me was all of a piece with his letters to you. That is enough to say about it—except that, during the interview, he told me something that I believe to be a mere tissue of falsehoods."

"And what was that, mamma?"

"He told me—think of the audacity and shamelessness of such an avowal!—he told me that at the time he married the Widow Wright, at St. Sebastian, he had a wife living in London."

"Oh, mother!" said Odalite, with a low cry of horror.

"To prove it, he took a slip of paper from his pocket-book, which he said was cut from the London *Times,* and which he said that he had received while staying at Niagara with us. It was, in fact, the notice of the death of his wife, and, if I remember rightly, it ran something like this:

"'DIED.—Suddenly, at Anglewood Manor, on August twenty-fifth, in the forty-ninth year of her age, Lady Mary, eldest daughter of the late and sister of the present Earl of Middlemoor, and wife of Col. the Hon. Angus Anglesea, late of the H.E.I.C.S.

"There, Odalite, I have tried to reproduce from memory the proof that he produced to establish as facts that his first wife was living at the time of his marriage with the Widow Wright, which was, consequently, not binding, and that she died some months before his marriage

with yourself, which is, according to him, lawful and binding."

"Oh, mother—mother! There seems to be no doubt of it!" wailed Odalite, throwing her arms over the table and dropping her head upon it in a sudden collapse of despair.

"Even if there were no doubt about the matter—even if he has a legal claim upon you—it is not a moral or Christian one, but a technicality which your father will never admit, even if that man should dare to come back and urge it."

"But, oh, mother, he will come back, some time, when he thinks the danger past, and he will put the screws upon you and me as he did before! He will make me declare that my happiness depends upon my reunion to him, my 'legal husband.' He will make you plead with my father to give me up without bringing the matter into court!" said Odalite, moaning, rather than speaking the words.

"Even if he should—even if you should declare that you wished to be reunited to that monster of wickedness, and even if I were to plead your cause, I tell you that your father would not only see you unhappy, but he would see you dead, before he would give you up to Angus Anglesea! He would prosecute him, and settle his claim in that way. But, Odalite, I do not believe that notice of his wife's death to be just what it purported to be, or just what he represented it to be."

"What do you mean, mother, dear? How can you doubt, when you yourself saw the printed slip, with name, place, day and date, family relations—all complete? Ah, me! I wish there was room for doubt!"

"There is wide room for doubt. The date of the day and of the month is given, but not the date of the year, in that slip; and I saw nothing but the slip, not the paper it was cut from. How, then, do I know that his first wife did not die on August twenty-fifth, two years

ago, or ten years ago, instead of in August of this year? It would be like him to produce an old obituary notice for purposes of deception."

"Oh-h-h!" eclaimed Odalite, as the new light of hope dawned on her mind.

"I confess that I did not think of this view of the case when he first showed me this notice, and, therefore, I was utterly bowed down by the sight of it. But now, the more I reflect upon it, the more convinced I feel that it was the notice of a death in an August of some previous year. Why, now I think of it, the very paper was soft and dark, and the printing was blurred, as by age and handling."

"Oh, mother, if I could but be certain that I am free!" sighed Odalite.

"Be certain of this—that you are free from him. He dare not return to this country to annoy you. He may write you threatening letters. Put them in the fire, and forget them."

"And—and—and—dear, true, noble Le!" sighed the girl.

"Of course, there must be no thought of an engagement between Leonidas and yourself. He has given me his word of honor that there shall not be. You may correspond as brother and sister; but his letters to you must, as a mere matter of prudence, come under cover to me. In three years Le will return to us. Much may happen in three years! But, in the meantime, oh, my daughter! 'keep innocency!' "

## CHAPTER XLV

### NEW YEAR'S EVE

For three days and nights the snow fell, covering all the ground for some feet deep.

Never, in the memory of the people, had such a snowfall been seen in that section. Yet it could scarcely be called a snowstorm, for there was no wind, not a single whiff, and therefore, of course, no snowdrifts. The snow fell slowly, evenly, steadily, dropping over the earth a soft, thick, white mantle.

"We shall be all snowed up, and there's an end to our New Year's dance at Oldfield," said Wynnette, as she stood at the front window of the little parlor, on the third day of the snowfall, looking drearily out over the white earth and powdering sky.

"It can't snow forever!" exclaimed Elva, who was seated at the center table, playing "jacks" with hazelnuts.

"I believe it will snow forever! It looks like it. Just look out and see! All the low fences are covered, and nothing but the tops of the high fences can be seen, and the Scotch firs are so loaded down with snow I should think the limbs would snap right off! And it is still snowing as steadily as ever! It just reminds one of the snowbound traveler at the 'Holly Tree Inn,' when—'It snowed, and it snowed, and it snowed, and it continued to snow, and it never ceased from snowing.' No, nor it never will!" said Wynnette, flattening her nose against the cold window pane.

"Call this snow?" rather slightingly demanded the lady from Wild Cats', as she sat in front of the wood fire, with her feet on the fender and her skirts drawn up to toast her shins, while she was eating hazelnuts, of which she had a lap full, and which she cracked with her

strong, white teeth. "Call this snow, indeed! You don't know what snow is! Hush, honeys! You ought to see the Nevadas after a midwinter snowfall! Yes! where whole trains of wagons are stopped and whole camps snowed up, until all hands perish of cold and hunger. Don't tell me! You don't know nothin' about snow here." And she stopped talking to put another nut between her teeth and crack it.

"I wouldn't mind if it wasn't for the New Year's Eve party," said Wynnette.

"Never mind, it will be clear to-morrow. You know we never do have more than three days at a time of any sort of bad weather—wind, or rain, or snow, or anything! I am sure it will clear off to-morrow," hopefully suggested Elva, deftly throwing a "jack" into the air and snatching two from the table in time to catch the falling one.

"I know it won't be clear to-morrow! Just look how it comes. I can hardly see the fir trees now through the thick falling powder. No! it is going to keep on this way forever and ever," growled Wynnette, who was, for her, in a very despondent mood.

Next day, being New Year's Eve, it did clear off, however. And in the most delightful way. Not with a high wind, as it often does, to drift the new-fallen snow and obstruct the roads and make matters worse than before; but with a still, cold, bright, frosty air that hardened the snow and glazed its surface and made—such splendid sleighing.

"Oh, good-morning, Sun!' said little Elva, standing at the front window of the parlor and looking eastward. "Good-morning, Sun! We are very glad to see you again!"

"After your uncommonly bad behavior in sulking and hiding yourself for the last three days," added Wynnette, who was now standing beside her youngest sister.

"You wrong the beautiful and benignant sun, Wyn-

nette, dear," said Miss Meeke, coming up behind them. "The sun is always shining for us. The earth turns around from the sun, and it is night—turns toward him, and it is day. The earth wanders far away from the sun, and it is winter—comes toward him again, and it is summer. But the sun shines in the empyrean all the time, wherever the earth may be. Fogs and mists arise from the land and water, condense in clouds, and obscure his glorious face, but they come down in rain or snow, clearing the atmosphere, and we say the sun shines again, when, in truth, he has been shining all the time. And as it is with the sun and earth, dear children, so it is with our Father in heaven and ourselves. We turn away from Him, and our souls grow dark; we turn to Him again, and we receive His light. We wander far from Him into selfishness and worldliness, and we suffer a spiritual coldness and blindness; we come back to Him, and we are warmed and enlightened by His love and His wisdom. Sometimes doubts and fears and hates—the opposites of faith and hope and love—arise from our lower nature and hide from us the face of our Father in heaven; but He has not changed. He is always ready to bless us when we turn again to Him—turn in truth and love, children, not in terror and self-seeking. So, dear ones, when clouds and storms darken the atmosphere, think of the sun that is shining above them; and when doubts and fears and sorrows and temptations come, think of the love and wisdom and power of our Father in heaven, and turn to Him for light and strength and guidance."

Miss Meeke's little lesson was interrupted by the entrance of Mr. Force, who gave a cheery good-morning to the young trio, and then said:

"Well, my dears, after all you have the prospect of a very pleasant afternoon and evening. The sun, you see, has come out brightly. The snow is frozen as hard as a rock. The moon is full to-night. The sleighing

will be capital both in going and coming, and you will have the moonlight in coming home."

"There will be eight of us to go, papa," said Wynnette, beginning to count on her fingers. "There will be you and mamma, two; Le and Odalite, four; Elva and I, six; and Miss Meeke and Mrs. Anglesea, eight. Can we all go in one sleigh? It will be so much jollier if we can."

"With a little sociable crowding, which no one will object to on a cold winter night, we can all go in one sleigh—the largest one, of course, and with four draught horses, equally of course."

While he spoke Mrs. Anglesea came in, eating a large pippin. She bade a general good-morning with her mouth full, took the chair which Mr. Force politely placed for her before the fire, hoisted her stoutly booted feet on the fender, drew up the edge of her skirt to toast her shins as usual, and went on eating her apple, remarking that it had cleared off very cold, and that she always ate an apple before breakfast, when she could get one, to help her digestion.

Now no one could look at the lady from the gold mines and imagine that there was, ever had been, or ever could be, anything the matter with her digestion; but Mr. Force replied that it was no doubt a very healthy habit.

"You bet!" exclaimed the lady from Wild Cats', "Why, old man, if you was to eat an apple every day before breakfast, or better still, two or three of them, it would clarify your liver and take some o' that yellowness out'n your skin, and give you an appetite, and put some flesh on them bare bones of your'n. You bet!"

Mr. Force bowed gravely, thanked her, and said he would think of it.

Other members of the family dropped in, as it was now near the breakfast hour. And the conversation ran on the clear, crisp day, the fine sleighing opportunities,

and the coming dance of the evening. All was pleasant anticipation. The day was spent in preparations.

It was still an hour to sundown when the whole family, including, of course, the guest, after an early tea, and being well wrapped up in hooded cloaks and heavy shawls, entered a capacious sleigh, lined with bearskins, furnished with foot warmers, and drawn by four strong horses, covered their laps with more bearskins and started for Oldfield.

The full moon was rising over the bay on the east, and the sun was sinking behind the high, wooded hill on the west, as they passed out of the south gate and entered the turnpike road that skirted the hill and then ran parallel to the shore of the bay all the way to Oldfield Farm. It was a fine, level road along the shore, and they had a delightful sleigh ride over the frozen snow, which, in a little more than an hour's time, brought them to Oldfield Farm. The approach from the bay side was through a pine wood, from which, when they emerged, they came in view of the house, which was lighted up from garret to ground floor. Half a dozen or more of other sleighs, which had brought company to the farm, and from which the horses had been taken and led to the stable, stood in the yard.

The negro boy, Dan, no longer ragged, as when we first made his acquaintance at Grove Hill, but dressed neatly in his new Christmas suit, came to the horses' heads, while Mr. Force and Leonidas got out to assist the ladies and children to alight.

"Marse Abul," said Dan, apologetically, "I can take dese horses to de stable, an' put all dese b'arskins in de lof', an' 'vite Uncle Jake inter de kitchen, but I 'spects I'll hab ter leabe de big sleigh out yere, caze dere ain't no room in de stable fo' all dese yer big sleighs in de yard. 'Sides w'ich, it bein' ob a cl'ar night, de sleigh won't take no harm."

"All right; leave the sleigh here, my boy," said Mr.

Force, drawing his wife's arm within his own, and leading the way into the lighted passage, followed by all the rest of his party.

On the right side of the passage was an open door, leading into a room in which tables along the walls were covered with Christmas goodies; while on the left hand was another room, in which were gathered about thirty people, young, middle-aged and old—some sitting down, some standing in groups, some walking about in pairs, and all talking at once, and no one listening, apparently.

At the end of the hall, directly opposite the front door, there was a flight of steps leading to the rooms above, and up these stairs our party went to take off their wraps. In the upper passage there were doors on the right and left leading into bedrooms. At one of these doors, on the right, stood Peggy Grandiere, ready to show the lady guests into their dressing room; at the opposite door, on the left, stood Sam Grandiere, ready to show the gentlemen into theirs.

Here, of course, our set divided and followed their guides—Mr. Force and Leonidas going one way and Mrs. Force and her party the other.

In the ladies' room they found a good, open fire, and the colored girl Henny in atendance; but there was none of the company present besides themselves, except Miss Sibby Bayard, who was standing before the glass, settling a smart cap made of white Irish gauze and white satin ribbon on her head.

"Good-evening! That's right! I am glad to see you all here! Be merry while you may, sez I; for you don't often get the chance, sez I!"

Such was her general greeting of the party; but after she had fixed her cap to her mind, she turned around and shook hands with every individual.

When Mrs. Force and her party had laid off their wraps, they stood up in the same costumes they had worn at their own Christmas Eve dance. There was no

extravagance, and but little variety of dressing in that neighborhood.

A changing of boots for slippers, a little shaking down of slightly rumpled skirts, a little touching up of slightly disarranged hair, a drawing on and buttoning of kid gloves, and they were all ready.

Their two gentlemen met them at the chamber door, and they went down together.

Their entrance seemed to complete the expected company, and to give the signal for "the opening of the ball," for before seats could be found for the elders of the party the musicians, consisting of two negro fiddlers, a tambourine and a banjo player, struck the stirring, old-fashioned tune of the "Fisher's Hornpipe." And gentlemen immediately took their partners—Mr. Force led out Mrs. Anglesea; Leonidas took Odalite; Ned and Sam Grandiere, Wynnette and Elva, for one set. William Elk and Thomas Grandiere, the elders, took respectively Miss Sukey Grandiere and Miss Sibby Bayard; Dr. Ingle and Roland Bayard took respectively Natalie Meeke and Rosemary Hedge. These formed the second set. There was not room enough in the farmhouse parlor for a third set, so about half the company had to wait their turn; but they amused thmselves very well in the interim by listening to the music, watching the dancers, gossiping, flirting, and making flying excursions into the dining room for refreshment in the form of plum cake, pound cake, raisins and almonds, and sugar kisses, lemon punch, apple toddy, or eggnogg.

When the first quadrilles were completed, another set of dancers took the place of the first, and the former rested on their laurels, watched their successors on the floor, gossiped and flirted, and made flying excursions to the dining room in their turn.

And high festivity continued until the tall clock in the passage struck twelve, when the music stopped in the

middle of "Malbrook," and all then mingled together, shaking hands and wishing each other

"Happy New Year."

Then all the dancers formed a double line the whole length of the parlor, for the giddy, whirling, exhilarating Virginia reel, with which the ball ended.

Finally, there went around a huge jug of hot mulled port wine, from which a goblet was filled for every guest.

And when this had been drunk amid much jesting and laughter, the company put on their wraps and hoods, bade good-night to their hosts, entered their sleighs, and, with more jesting and more laughter, started for a moonlight drive over the frozen snow to their several homes.

And so ended the New Year's Eve party at Oldfield Farm.

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## CHAPTER XLVI

### THE LADY FROM THE MINES HAS A PLAN

New Year's morning dawned clear and cold.

The family of Mondreer, on account of the party at Oldfield on the previous evening, and the long sleigh ride home "in the wee, sma' hours" before the dawn, slept later than usual that day, so that it was nine o'clock before they were all gathered around the breakfast table, to renew their New Year's greetings over the first morning meal of the year.

The pleasant party of the previous evening was discussed, and then the program of the passing day.

The holiday was to be kept very unostentatiously.

It had been the annual custom of many years for Mr. and Mrs. Force to entertain the Rev. Dr. and Mrs. Peters to dinner at Mondreer on New Year's Day. The cus-

tom had not been neglected on the present occasion, and the rector of All Faith and his wife were expected to come. Young Dr. Ingle, in consideration of his betrothal to Natalie Meeke, had been invited to meet the Peters.

These were the only arrangements for keeping New Year's Day at Mondreer.

As there was no church service on that day, the party from the rectory arrived early in the forenoon, for the people of the neighborhood, even on festive occasions, kept the healthful, old-fashioned hours, and dined soon after noon. The rector and his wife were a fine old couple, without children at home, and very much devoted to each other.

Mrs. Anglesea, efflorescent in a cardinal-red damasse silk, and heavy gold jewelry, seized upon the clerical pair instantly as her own especial prey, because they were new acquaintances, who had not heard the story of her marriage, her robbery and her desertion by her husband, from her own lips.

Mrs. Anglesea took so much pleasure in telling her tale that Wynnette, in her pungent way, said that the lady from the Wild Cats' Gulch was a reincarnation of the spirit of the Ancient Mariner, with the variation that to her every new acquaintance was a "wedding guest," to whom she was bound to tell her story. And that for all the sufferings the injured wife had endured she found full compensation in the narration of her great wrongs, and in the abuse of the enormous villainy of her husband.

And facts really bore out Wynnette's theory.

"Now! What do you think of Angus Anglesea for a gentleman and an officer?" demanded Mrs. Anglesea of the rector and his wife, when she had finished her relation.

"We must not judge. We must forgive," said the mild minister.

" 'Forgive!' " echoed the lady from the mines. " 'Forgive!' I like that; but you are a man, parson, and of course you will take sides with a man, and want me to 'forgive' him. Set him up with it, and you, too! But I'll put it to your ole 'oman here," she added, turning to the rector's wife. "Now see here, ma'am. Take it home, and put yourself in my place. Suppose now that your ole man, the parson there, had a-gone, and a-married of you, and then a-gone and robbed of you of all your money, and levanted off some'er's and married some other 'oman. Could you have 'forgive' him? I put it to yourself now. Answer me."

But the mere hypothesis that the venerable and reverend Dr. Peters could ever by any possibility have been guilty of such misdemeanors was so overwhelming, not to say paralyzing, that the minister's wife could only drop her jaw, open her mouth, and stare.

"I'll forgive that devil after he is well hanged, and not a half a second before. 'Cause it wouldn't be safe, nohow."

The entrance of young Dr. Ingle put an end to the subject. He had heard the story of the lady's wrongs so often that he did not need to hear any part of it repeated.

Mrs. Force, her three daughters, and Miss Meeke, soon filed in, and the conversation became general.

Mr. Force and Leonidas entered soon after, and only in time for dinner.

The afternoon was passed in chess, music and conversation, and after an early tea Dr. and Mrs. Peters bade good-by to their entertainers and started for their home.

Dr. Ingle lingered longer—in fact, until after ten o'clock, the usual bedtime at Mondreer, and then at length he said good-night and went away.

But the family of Mondreer did not immediately retire on the departure of their last guest.

Was not this the first of January? And was not their dear Leonidas to leave them on the second?

They could not bid him good-night so soon. They lingered in the drawing room long after the departure of their last guest.

Mrs. Anglesea, who had by her fine animal instincts scented out the state of affairs in the family which entertained her, watched Leonidas and Odalite with lynx eyes.

"Them young uns is sweethearts," she said, in an aside to Miss Meeke, as she pointed to the youthful pair, who, seated on the cushioned sill of the bay window, were exchanging their last confidences. "Them young uns is sweethearts, as sure as you're born. And why she didn't choose him, instead of choosing my beat, beats me. But perhaps the match was made up all along of the old folks. Shouldn't wonder. Not I! But if they are fond o' one another, why, in the name o' sense, can't the knot be tied afore he goes to sea? They'd be a heaper better contented in parting from one another if they knowed that they belonged to each other, certain sure, no matter what might happen."

"Yes," replied Miss Meeke. "I think that they are lovers still. And I know that they were engaged to be married before he went to sea the first time, and they would have been married on his return from his first voyage if Col. Anglesea had not come between them. I betray no confidence in telling you this, for the whole county knows it well."

"To be sure they do. Why, didn't I hear all about it before ever I entered into this house? You just bet I did. But why she ever could have thrown over that fine young fellow for my old rascal is more than I can tell."

"I suppose he fascinated her in some way," suggested Natalie.

"You bet your pile on that. Lord! how that man

could make love when he tried! Why, there was poor John, my first husband, poor, dear fellow!—that ever I should have forgot him so far as to take up with this furriner!—poor John, after keeping company with me for more'n a year, and never saying a word to me about love, or his heart, or anything, though we knew how it was with each other well enough, one summer Sunday night, when the moon was a-shining bright as day, he kind o' loitered at the gate, and sort o' kicked the gravel slowlike with his foot, and then said:

"'Well, Marier, when hed I better speak to the ole man?'

"And I said: 'Fust time you see him, John.' And that was all. Every word of love-making that passed betwixt us two until we was married."

"He was a plain, good, honest man," put in Miss Meeke.

"You bet your pile on that! And you won't lose nothing by it! He was a good, true man, and so I found him, else I shouldn't a-followed of him all round the world, and out to Wild Cats' Gulch! But as for this other fellow! Lord! Why, from the minute he made up his mind to marry and rob me, he did nothing but make love! Lord, how he could do it! Like a play-actor! Why, honey, one time he fell on his knees before me and looked up in my face in such a way! And what on earth can an ordinary 'oman do when a man goes down on his marrow bones and rolls up his eyes like a dying duck? She has to sort o' give in to him whether she wants to or not! for fear he'd get worse, and have a fit, and do hisself a mischief of some sort! And all the time, dear, it wasn't the poor Californy widow he was after; but her poor, dear, dead-and-gone husband's pile, as he had made by the sweat of his brow, and lost his life in making, too! He fashionated me into marrying of him and trusting of him until he levanted with all my money! And he fashionated that young girl there until

she throwed over her own true love for him! But his fashionations don't last long after he is found out—that is one good thing! Leastways they didn't with me, and they don't seem to have done so with her. I come to my senses soon's ever I found out as he had robbed me and run away. And she come to hers soon's ever she found out he had a lawful wife living. But now that the grand vilyun is out of the way, and the young turtledoves has made it all up, why can't they be married before he goes off to sea?" earnestly inquired the Californian lady.

"I wish to Heaven it might be done!" fervently exclaimed Natalie, who, in the happiness of her own love-life, felt a deep sympathy for the young pair in the bay window.

"And why might it not, then? That is what I want to know. There's no lawful impediment why them two mightn't be made one right off! My scamp can't have any claim on her to hinder of it! Good Lord! No! I should think not! When here I am his lawful wife, alive, and likely to live! And a man can't have two wives, in this State, at least! So why can't them young uns be married, and made happy right away?"

"I wish it could be done; but I feel sure that it could not."

"But why, in the name o' common sense?"

"Because neither Mr. nor Mrs. Force would entertain such a plan for a moment. They would consider it indelicate and undignified in all parties concerned to marry their daughter to any other suitor, even though that suitor were Mr. Leonidas Force, so soon after the breaking off of her marriage ceremony with her late bridegroom-expectant," replied Natalie.

"Fiddle-faddle!" exclaimed the lady from Wild Cats'. "I think it is hard enough for poor human natur' to keep the commandments of the Lord and the laws of the land without having to be bound by a passel of fiddle-faddle fancies!"

"My private opinion is," said Natalie, "that the young couple will yet marry; but not until he shall return from his next voyage. And they are both young enough to wait."

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## CHAPTER XLVII

### LEONIDAS LEAVES MONDREER

"Aunty," said Leonidas, taking the hand of Odalite, and leading her up to Mrs. Force, who stood before the grand piano, putting away the sheets of music before closing the instrument—"aunty, dear, I am not going away to-morrow."

"What now?" inquired the lady, in some uneasiness.

"I mean I am not going away to-morrow morning. I can go to-morrow night, and be in time to join my ship on the third. It will be a close shave, as to time, auntie; but then, it will give me twelve more hours with you all. Twelve precious hours! Aunty, are you sorry? You look so grave."

"No, dear boy, I am glad to have you until the last possible moment. I only regret that you have to go at all," kindly replied Mrs. Force.

"Yaw! Oh, Lord! I could crack my jawbones a-gasping! Never was so sleepy in my life! Say, good folks, ain't it time to go to bed? After being up most all night, and not even getting a wink of sleep this morning."

The suggestion came from the lady from the gold diggings, of course; and it was so speedily acted upon—especially since Leonidas had announced his intention of deferring his departure until the next night—that in less than half an hour the parties had separated and retired to their several bedrooms.

The next day was the last that Leonidas Force would spend at Mondreer for three years, at least.

All that day Mr. Force was closeted with his overseer, in his office, looking over the farm books and making up the accounts for the year just closed.

Mrs. Force was merciful, and told Leonidas and Odalite to spend this last day as they pleased.

The young couple, warmly clothed, set out through the splendid winter sunshine and over the crisply frozen snow to walk to Greenbushes.

They went out by the north gate, through the woods, across Chincapin Creek, and so on to the farmhouse.

They took the housekeeper by surprise indeed; but they never could take her unprepared.

She soon laid as dainty a repast upon the table as two young people, with healthy appetites sharpened by a brisk walk through the winter woods, ever sat down to and enjoyed.

The two lingered over that meal, playing at housekeeping, playing at being master and mistress at their own table.

When they were tired of that little drama they went all through the house, Odalite seeing the improvements that had been made there during the weeks of her absence.

"All this new furniture is to be packed up or covered over, and the rooms are to be closed up, and only opened occasionally to be dried or aired. And, my darling of darlings, I mean never to live in this house until I can bring you here as its mistress. I ask no promise from you, my dear, for I must not; but I can and will give you mine," said Leonidas, earnestly.

"Le, dear, you do not need a promise from me, nor I from you. We know and can trust each other, dear. And, Le, I will come over here once every week to open and air the rooms and inspect the furniture, so that nothing shall come to harm from ignorance or neglect. And,

Le, this weekly work will be my happiest employment, except that of writing to you."

"Dear Odalite, now I feel that you are my own again. This weekly work, as you call it, will be a sign between us. It will be your own house you will be watching over, darling. And when I return from this voyage, if all should go well with us, we will settle down here, and I will never go to sea again. We two shall not be so very old when I come home again. You will be twenty, and I will be twenty-five."

She smiled up in his face in her old arch manner, but made no reply in words.

When they had gone through all the rooms, as it was some time after noon, they took leave of Greenbushes and of the old servants, and set out to return to Mondreer.

They varied their walk by going down the wooded hill to the bay and walking along the shore until they reached Mondreer, and up the wooded hill again to the mansion.

"This is our last walk by the shore for three years to come; but it is also the happiest we have had since my return from sea; for now we fully understand and trust one another," said Le, as they re-entered the house.

The short winter afternoon was drawing to a close. The sun was just above the wooded hills on the western horizon, and the moon had not yet risen above the bay.

It had been arranged that Mr. Force, Odalite, Wynnette and Elva should accompany their cousin to the distant railway to see him off—"to see the last of him," as Wynnete put it, in a tragi-comic air. They were to go in the large sleigh, drawn by a pair of draught horses driven by Jake.

Tea had been ordered at half-past five o'clock, and the sleigh was to be brought to the door at six. By that time the moon would be up and the road lightened.

The servants were punctual. At the appointed hour

the whole family gathered around the tea table, and by much tea drinking and more talking and laughing, tried to enliven the gloom of the last hour.

As soon as tea was over, the girls flew off upstairs to put on hooded cloaks and shawls and overshoes for their moonlight sleigh ride. Leonidas put on his ulster and seal cap, and then made a round of the house and the stables and quarters to bid good-by to all the servants, who gave him many prayers and blessings, after the manner of their warm hearts.

When he returned to the hall he found Mr. Force and the three girls already packed in the sleigh under heaps of bearskins.

"Make your adieus as brief as possible, my dear boy! It is necesasry to 'speed the parting guest,' or he will not catch the train, and then what will become of his official honor?" called out Mr. Force from the sleigh.

Le caught his aunt in his arms and kissed her while he received her blessing. Then he embraced Miss Meeke, who cried over him a little. Finally he gave his hand to Mrs. Anglesea to bid her a respectful and friendly good-by; but that affectionate creature caught him in her arms and pressed him to her bosom, saying, when she had kissed him heartily:

"Lord bless you, young un! I don't care if you do miss the train and fail to report for duty and get court-martialed and dismissed the service; for then yer can stay home and marry your gal—and let honor be hanged and the service go to Old Scratch! You'll be happy with your fine farm and your pretty wife."

"Come, come, Le! My dear fellow, come!" called Mr. Force.

Leonidas broke away from the kindly arms that held him and hurried into the sleigh, which started off so suddenly that the young midshipman literally dropped into the seat that had been kept for him beside Odalite.

The sleigh sped over the snow-clad, moonlit ground, through the north gate of the lawn and into the forest.

Before reaching Chincapin Creek it turned off to the left and took the road to the railway station.

Their way lay through the forest for many a mile. Odalite and Leonidas sat in the back seat, covered with the same bearskin, and with their hands clasped together. Very few words passed between them. But the frequent hand pressures silently spoke.

Wynnette and Elva sat in front of them, and chattered incessantly to encourage themselves and their party, very much upon the same principle that boys are said to whistle in going through a churchyard at night, to keep up their spirits—for the children loved their cousin dearly and hated to part from him.

Mr. Force sat on the front seat beside Jake, who drove.

The horses went at full speed and fairly flew over the ground.

When they emerged at last from the forest they saw the lights in the railway station gleaming in the distance, and soon after heard the far-off thunder of the approaching train.

"Faster, Jacob! Faster!" cried Mr. Force. "Oh, Le, my boy, what a close shave this is! How much you have risked for the sake of spending a few more hours with us!"

"Well, I gained the hours, and I shall catch the train!" exclaimed the young man, as the sleigh suddenly pulled up before the ticket office at the same instant that the train ran into the station.

"Don't get out! there's no time!" exclaimed Le, as he suddenly strained Odalite to his bosom, kissed her passionately and started from his seat. A hasty handshake with his uncle and then with Jake, both of whom called blessings down on him; a hasty kiss to Wynnette and Elva, both of whom burst out crying and bellowed lustily; then a last long kiss again to his dear Odalite, who

received it in a suffocating silence; and the next moment the young man had jumped from the sleigh and disappeared in the station, and almost immediately the train went on.

The party in the sleigh waited in total silence but for the sobs of Wynnette and Elva, until the train had passed out of sight and hearing.

"I thought he might have missed it, but he has not," said Mr. Force.

"Oh, I wish, I wish he had!" sobbed Elva.

"But what would have become of his honor, my dear?" questioned her father.

"Oh, I don't care a pin for that sort of honor, any more than Mrs. Anglesea does! I wanted him—I loved him!" sobbed Elva.

"I don't see why people should part when they don't want to and are not obliged to, just for a notion!" cried Wynnette.

"Drive home, Jacob. But not too fast. We can spare the horses now," said Mr. Force.

And the coachman turned the horses' heads and took the homeward road.

They arrived at Mondreer at ten o'clock and found Mrs. Force, Mrs. Anglesea and Miss Meeke cozily sitting around the parlor fire and watching a jug of hot mulled port wine which the mistress had brewed for the returning cold and benumbed travelers.

Mrs. Force took Odalite in her arms and kissed her in silent sympathy, while Mrs. Anglesea occupied herself with the congenial task of pouring out the hot, spiced wine into glass goblets for the party.

They all sat around the table—those who had gone abroad and those who had stayed at home—and every one partook of the warming and exhilarating beverage, while Mr. Force related what a fine sleigh ride they had had, and how Le caught his train just in the nick of time.

They all drank Le's health in a final glass, and then separated, and retired to rest.

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## CHAPTER XLVIII

### A WEDDING AT MONDREER

How THEY missed Leonidas at Mondreer can be felt by all who have ever had a dear one leave the family for an absence of years in far distant lands.

In the city such a loss is felt painfully enough; but the busy life of the crowd distracts attention from individual missings.

In the country, and in the winter, when clouds, and rain, and snow prevail, and with bad weather they have worse roads, and no interchange of neighborly courtesies, and all within the house is still, silent and depressing, the absence of the friend is felt far more deeply.

The day after Le's departure the weather changed, bringing a dull, gray sky, and a warm rain, that melted all the splendor of the snow, and turned the hard roads into gullies of mud, so confining the family of Mondreer to their own house.

Certainly they tried "to be jolly under difficulties."

Mr. Force reminded them that they had really nothing to mourn over, since young navy officers must go to sea, and that if they all were as steady as Le the long voyage must do them good, improve their minds, and strengthen their bodies; and that they had much to be thankful for, since sickness and death had kept away from their homes.

Mrs. Force and Odalite were a little more silent than usual, and that was all the difference to be seen in them.

Wynnette went singing about the house, to pretend that she was merry. But, while gazing from the parlor

window out upon the dark sky full of soft, fine, warm rain that turned the lawn into a marsh, and hid the wooded hills on the west and the bay on the east from view, she suddenly snapped out:

"Euphonious Mondreer should be relegated to its original, descriptive name, and be called Mount Dreary, as it is in the old patents and deeds!"

"But was it Mount Dreary last week, when we had the glorious sunshine, and the splendid frost and snow, and the waters of the bay as blue as the sky they reflected, eh?" inquired Miss Meeke, deprecatingly.

"I don't know!" said Wynnette, perversely. "I don't remember any glorious sunshine, or splendid frost and snow, or any blue waters. It has always been rain, and mud, and darkness in this world ever since I was born! And I don't remember anything else, and I don't believe in anything else—there, now!"

"My dear! my dear! do not talk so!" said Miss Meeke.

"I can't help it," said Wynnette. "I know it always has been just this way, and it always will be. But who cares if it will? Not I, for one.

"'Hi diddle diddle! The cat and the fiddle!'"

sang Wynnette, dancing away from the dreary window and dancing out of the room.

As for little Elva, she went moping about the house, with red eyes, sniveling in the most undisguised manner.

Miss Meeke was gravely busy with her wedding preparations.

Mrs. Anglesea was the jolliest person in the house, sympathetically interested in everybody's feelings and occupations.

Occasionally, when there was a solemn pause in the conversation around the fire or around the board, the

happy creature would take the whole company to task for their gloom.

"Call this a parting, do you? Why, the young fellow hasn't gone out of reach of civilization—newspapers and mail bags and telegraph wires. Wait until he goes on a wild-goose chase after the North Pole, where you can't hear from him for months or years, even if you ever hear from him again, for his chances are to leave his bones on the icebergs, if they are not crunched up by the white bears. My father and my brother were whalers, and used to be gone for years, when we—mother and I—did not hear from them, and had to trust in Providence. And that was bad enough. But when they both went off on an Arctic cruise—craze, I called it—'long of Capt. Kane, I tell you that was a time of trial. But this young Le! Phew! Why, he's only just over there."

The near approach of Natalie Meeke's wedding, however, was the best diversion of all.

The whole family, from Mr. Force down to little Elva, were deply interested in it. They all made her useful presents. Mr. Force gave her a set of silver spoons and forks; Mrs. Force, a china tea set; Odalite, her own wedding dress, with all its accessories of wreath, veil and fan, etcetera; Wynnette, a handsomely bound Bible; and Elva, a prayer book and hymn book.

Mrs. Anglesea bestowed a heavy, gold cardcase.

"There! Take this, honey," she said, in presenting it. "I ain't got no use for it. I bought it when my dear old man made his first haul, and we went up to 'Frisco to sell the dust and have a lark. It took my fancy, for I thought it was a snuffbox. Now, all the wimmin out at Wild Cats' either smoked pipes or took snuff. As for me, I did neither. Couldn't get into the way of it, you see. But when I saw this splendid snuffbox—as I thought it was—I just said to myself I'd buy it, and carry it in my pocket, to have it always about me to

remind me as I was getting to be a rich 'oman, and to take it out and make a show of it by offering of any one who might drop in a pinch of snuff, even if I never sniffed a sniff myself. I thought it would take them all down. But, Lord! didn't one of 'em take me down, neither, when she up and told me as this was a wisitin' cardcase, and wouldn't do to hold snuff noways? Well, honey, it never was no use to me, for what call had I for a wisitin' cardcase at Wild Cat's? No, we didn't send up our cards when we called on our neighbors there. We didn't often put on our bonnets to go a-wisitin'. We just hev a' old shawl over our heads and run in and out 'mong neighbors. We did."

Natalie warmly thanked the donor, as soon as she could get a chance to speak.

Dr. Ingle and Miss Meeke were married on the twentieth of January.

The sky had cleared, the ground had dried, the roads were good.

The wedding was a quiet one, no one being invited but the oldest and most intimate friends of the parties—that is to say, the Rev. Dr. and Mrs. Peters, of All Faith Rectory; the Grandieres, of Oldfield; the Elks, of Grove Hill; Miss Bayard, of Forest Rest, and Mr. Roland Bayard, of nowhere in particular.

The ceremony was performed in the drawing room of Mondreer, by the Rev. Dr. Peters. The bride was given away by Mr. Force. She wore the elegant wedding dress which had been prepared for Odalite; the two little bridesmaids wore the same dresses in which they had appeared at the attempted wedding of the month previous. Roland Bayard was the groomsman.

Immediately after the ceremony the bride's cake was cut and served. Roland Bayard received the hidden ring, which promised him a bride in the course of the year, and he immediately crossed the room and put it on the finger of little Rosemary Hedge, amid the good-

humored congratulations and laughter of the little company, and to the great confusion of the quaint, little girl who had been favored.

Soon after this the negro fiddlers came in and tuned up their instruments.

The young men took their partners and the dancing began.

Roland Bayard, as groomsman, opened the ball with the bride. Dr. Ingle, with the first bridesmaid, was their *vis-à-vis*. The dancing continued until ten o'clock, when an elegant little supper was served in the dining room.

After this the bride changed her dress, and the just-wedded pair took leave of their friends, and entered the carriage engaged for the occasion, and amid a shower of slippers departed for the young doctor's new home.

The subsequent developments of Anglesea's machinations will be related in the sequel to this volume, entitled "Love's Bitterest Cup." This is published in uniform style and price with this volume.

THE END

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There is really but little pure romance in this story, for the author has taken care to imagine love passages only between those whom history has credited with having entertained the tender passion one for another, and he succeeds in making such lovers as all the world must love.

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Who can read of the beginning of that sweet life, named Mara, which came into this world under the very shadow of the Death angel's wings, without having an intense desire to know how the premature bud blossomed? Again and again one lingers over the descriptions of the character of that baby boy Moses, who came through the tempest, amid the angry billows, pillowed on his dead mother's breast.

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